Presenting information is the nuts-and-bolts of communication design. It focuses more on words and numbers than on a conscious style. This @Issue features two views of information-driven design, starting with techniques used by Morningstar to make complex mutual fund data accessible. For communicating with travelers, we look at Düsseldorf Airport’s new directional signage system. In our executive interview, Chrysler Vice Chairman Robert A. Lutz discusses the company’s design ethics. Remember our earlier Abstract Painting survey? Turn to page 14 for reader responses. Our most tantalizing story is on Joseph Schmidt and his amazing chocolate creations. Then learn why we picked Crayola as our Business and Design Classic.
Chrysler’s Robert A. Lutz on Design

Chrysler Vice Chairman Robert A. Lutz talks with Peter Lawrence, Chairman of Corporate Design Foundation, about the role that design has played in changing Chrysler from the “perpetual problem child of the auto industry” to Forbes magazine’s 1996 Company of the Year.

A 1994 New York Times piece, “The Designers Who Saved Chrysler,” claims “design alchemy” transformed Chrysler from “the basket case of the auto world to leading the resurgence of the American auto industry.” Was it just vehicle design that made the difference?

That’s only half the story. Also going on inside Chrysler at the time was a different sort of design alchemy — and, in fact, it’s the thing that made our new product designs and a whole lot else possible. I’m talking about how we totally redesigned our organization at Chrysler.

What was Chrysler like before the reorganization?

It was organized around a very traditional, sequential, component-based process characterized by vertically oriented functions — or “chimneys,” as we liked to call them. Most departments were in separate buildings, literally insulated by bricks and mortar. Our designers worked pretty much in a vacuum, conceiving a product and “throwing it over the wall” to engineering in the next building, which would do the same to procure-ment and supply, and down the line. This caused the product development process to function in a sequential manner with lots of miscommunications, false starts and waste. There was no simultaneous contact, no exchange of ideas, no trade-offs occurring early in the program.

Did you topple the chimneys at Chrysler?

Yes, we have replaced them with completely horizontal, cross-functional “platform teams.” Our entire company is now organized around information flows, not traditional notions of function. Decision trade-offs are concurrent, not sequential, and made at the lowest possible level in the organization. Our senior managers also have two distinct job titles — one functional, one cross-functional. For instance, the head of our Jeep/truck platform team is vice president of engineering technologies. This natural check-and-balance system keeps the focus on the whole, rather than on pieces of the whole. It is one reason why we’re able to achieve not just “process-driven design” in our organization, but, equally important in our view, “design-driven processes.”
How has the new Chrysler Technology Center supported your reorganization?

Now designers, aesthetic designers, technical designers in the form of engineers, procurement and supply people, key suppliers, finance, marketing and so forth, all work on a vehicle program simultaneously from inception to prototype, through prototype hardware and ready-for-volume production, all in our virtually "wall-less" Technology Center. Employees are in constant contact. They can go down an escalator and into the shops where the vehicles are physically taking shape. They can go from computer screen to conference room, down to view the "physicals" without moving more than 30 yards or so. That has been proven to be of enormous value. As Winston Churchill once observed, "We shape our buildings; thereafter, they shape us."

Does the Chrysler Technology Center allow more interaction among employees?

The Chrysler Technology Center is laid out in an open way, with large atriums and various levels connected by escalators. It has fast food places and cafeterias to encourage intermingling of employees from various functions and disciplines. Chance encounters and semi-relevant conversations often lead to some of the most creative breakthroughs.

A building can greatly facilitate that, or hinder it.

How does Chrysler integrate the use of design with its corporate strategy and objectives?

We keep reminding ourselves that almost every vehicle out there—old, new, big, small, passenger cars, sports utility, roadster, minivan—fulfills the basic transportation function, and they all fulfill it roughly equally well. Yet people yawn for the news. They go for the good-looking vehicle. That's why advance product design is the core of our business strategy. Often we adopt designs that other companies may compromise. For example, the engineers may say the design is too difficult to execute; it's going to add weight or cost. They ask if they can move something an inch. We say, "No, the whole vehicle concept depends on the integrity of the design. Try to work with it, without watering it down."

We also expect the design process to come up with completely new directions for us to go in, such as finding new ways to interpret transportation or psychological needs. We expect the design ethic, and not necessarily the designers, to drive everything.

Wasn't the Dodge Viper an example of Chrysler's design ethic and team approach?

Yes, probably no other car company on earth would have or could have put this design into production. The original Viper concept car was first shown at the 1989 Detroit Auto Show. Response on the auto-show circuit that winter was so overwhelming for this V-10, 400-horsepower threashold to the original Shelby Cobra that we decided, what the hell, let's build it! Since we were going broke at the time, we figured we might as well go out with a bang. The Viper street car went from show car to showroom in just three years flat. Team Viper, made up of just 85 people, proved to us there was magic in small, empowered, co-located teams. It was the forerunner of our platform team approach.

In a speech, I heard you say, "The customer is not always right." Could you explain that comment?

At Chrysler, we love our customers and listen to them, but we don't expect them to do our critical creative thinking for us. Customers have a rear-view mirror perspective. They can tell us what they like among designs that are already out there. But when it comes to the future, why should we expect them to be clairvoyant.

For the Dodge Viper, we did absolutely no market research. That's not to say we hate research; we consider it a valuable tool—but only for confirmation. To come up with great creative ideas, you simply have to have an unfettered, free-flowing environment. You can't find those kinds of ideas simply by sifting through market-research data.

At Chrysler, we like to zig just about the time everybody else is zagging. For instance, just about when everyone else was trying to catch up to modern looks like car-forward, we decided to go in a completely different direction with a concept car called the Chrysler Atlantic, first shown at Detroit Auto Show in 1996. Could you talk about this most recent concept car, the Atlantic?

The Atlantic was Chrysler's desire to think along new avenues. Historically, automotive design has been linear. In the teens, cars looked like horseless carriages. In the late '20s and '30s, they became very boxy, and in the mid-'30s, they became boxes with rounded corners. Toward the end of the '30s, streamlining came in. In the '50s, we got into the "pontoon" shape where the fenders disappeared. Then we moved more and more toward pure aerodynamic shapes. Some people predicted, "That's a road to nowhere, because if you go for the pure aerodynamic shape, all cars are going to look the same." That's as silly as saying, since fish are all formed hydro-dynamically, all fish are going to look the same.

However, on the other hand, I asked the designers, "What are we going to do when we've run the full course of more and more modern?" If you look at other industries, whether watches, fountain pens or furniture, many have successfully gone back and picked up great themes out of history and brought them up-to-date using modern proportions, materials and surfaces to avoid some of the convoluted detail that we had back then. There is a way to bring the essence and character of those designs into the present day. It is a treasure trove, a mother lode of design ideas that you can reach into and grab. Needless to say, we are going to exploit it.

The new Atlantic pays homage to the heroic look of the custom coachwork era of the '20s and '30s.

At Chrysler, does design excellence extend beyond the look of the vehicle?

Design is important to everything you communicate about your product and your business. It includes design ethos such as the appearance of your annual report, product catalogs and dealerships. Very good companies will have the same design ethic not only in their products, but in every way that they face the public, whether it's a web site or the tonality of their advertising. Even the quality of paper used in the catalog is part of conveying a sense of design excellence. The same is true in the physical workplace facilities. It can be both a manifestation of a company's design ethic and an outward communication of a company's design ethic and drive for excellence.

Do you think the understanding and use of design is changing in business?

It certainly has changed in our company and, I think, it's changing in general. Everything has gotten so competitive. For example, oil companies spend considerable amounts of money and energy on gas station design. They're making sure that they look accessible and friendly and not in any way claustrophobic. Nearly all businesses have realized the importance of product design. But when it comes to the importance of adopting a design orientation, the way you design your processes and corporations and how it looks to the outside world, I don't think that understanding is very deep yet. It seems that many corporate senior executives don't feel that design is important to business success. Why do you think this is the case?

Most senior executives today are the products of the way our business schools worked 20 or 30 years ago. Anything judgmental, artistic or non-quantifiable was felt to be irrelevant and non-existent. If you can't prove it in numbers, then go away and don't bother me. This left-brain-focused ethic is still very much with many senior executives. Chrysler and many other companies are being run by a combination of right-brained and left-brained people. Best yet are people who are both right-brained and left-brained, and have that balance of appreciating the artistic non-quantifiable side of the business while respecting the numbers. I think that's the combination that clicks. But it is not yet a prevalent combination in American business.
Designing for Data

One of the hottest financial services companies in the industry, Morningstar has carved out a strong brand identity for itself by emphasizing design in the creation of its database products. Attractive and intelligently designed, the Morningstar “page” is often asked for by name and lauded for providing useful information on mutual funds to individual investors.

Joe Mansueto  
Founder and Chairman  
Championing design from the start, investor Joe Mansueto believes that “good design leads to increased product demand, which leads to greater profits.”

David Williams  
Design Director  
Working with design consultant Philip Burton, David Williams leads Morningstar’s in-house design team and closely collaborates with the company’s editors.

Back in 1984, a 27-year-old financial analyst in Chicago named Joe Mansueto anticipated that aging baby boomers, fretting over the possibility of a bankrupt Social Security system, would seek shelter in the stock market. “Mutual funds were beginning to grow strongly, but it was an underserved market,” Mansueto recalls. “People needed reliable information to make more intelligent decisions. Problem was, a lot of information on mutual funds was available to institutional investors, but nothing for the general public.”

Sensing an untapped opportunity, Mansueto decided to take institutional-quality information and bring it down to a mass level to the people who were really buying mutual funds. Camping out in his one-bedroom apartment, he started a quarterly publication called “The Mutual Fund Sourcebook” and began building a mutual funds database.

This year that business, which Mansueto named Morningstar, expects to report $40 million in revenue.

Customers have been drawn to the quality and accessibility of Morningstar’s financial materials, and Mansueto attributes much of that success to the effective use of design. “Creating products that are intelligently designed, attractive and display information in a helpful context is a core part of our business,” he says. “Morningstar, at its heart, is an information company, so part of the design problem is how to display all this information in a way that is logical and helps the user extract greater value from it. We wrestle with many, many design issues here. Part of my job is to say that design is important and to get people focusing on it and to recruit wonderful talent to concentrate on these issues.”

His determination began with a telephone call to the legendary designer Paul Rand in 1989. “After the company was five years old and we were on a firmer footing, I thought it was time to improve our design standards,” recalls Mansueto. “I looked at our old logo and knew we had to start there. It seemed difficult to institute a high-quality design program without a proper logo.”

Mansueto had read Rand’s “A Designer’s Art,” and became a fan of the landmark logo that Rand had created for IBM, Cummins, UPS, ABC, NeXT, among others. He tracked the 75-year-old Rand down at his Weston, Connecticut home,
and pursued him with letters and phone calls, finally flying to Connecticut to meet with him in person. After hearing Mansueto's request, Rand replied, "I'll work on it and let you know when I'm done." Four months later, Rand sent Mansueto the finished piece. Although Rand's design fee was $50,000, a significant sum for a company then ringing up sales of 81-2 million, Mansueto calls the logo "one of our most valuable assets. Paul Rand. That's where our design program began."

Concerned that "some hack" would devalue the effectiveness of his logo, Rand, an avowed curmudgeon who died in 1997, introduced Mansueto to Philip Burton, telling him that with Phil he'd be in good hands. Burton, who Rand had taught with at Yale, had studied in the Swiss school of typography. Thanks to that background, Burton is the kind of designer who enjoys puzzling out the nuances of complex information problems. Morningstar had a vexing one: the redesign of the company's core product, "the page" — a dense, constantly updated sheet of data, graphs, charts and analysis for a given mutual fund. Burton, an associate professor of graphic design at the University of Illinois at Chicago, agreed to work with Morningstar as a design consultant, which he continues to do.

"When I first saw the page," recalls Burton, "you can't have a page with type in all caps, with different point sizes, with different weights. Information design is not the kind of thing people find flashy. It's dealing with lots of data. The job is to make things clear."

In tackling the project, Burton needed a like-minded associate on staff at Morningstar. He introduced Mansueto to David Williams, a designer for the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago who had been a student of his at Yale. Williams was hired as the company's design director.

"We started out saying, 'There's a tremendous truck-load of stuff on this page,'" Williams remembers. "We had to look at what groups of data existed. What should
The Page

Designers at Morningstar have spent countless hours analyzing ways to compress voluminous amounts of information onto a single page in a clear and accessible manner. A model for the industry, the Morningstar Page integrates numerous graphic devices to give investors at-a-glance information about the performance of a fund. To keep the layout clean and open, gratuitous design styling is absent; every graphic element contributes valuable information to the reader.

The Morningstar Rating

Morningstar's proprietary rating system graphically presents at-a-glance analysis. The historical risk vs. return performance of a fund is rated with stars.

Management Status

Arrow symbols represent four different types of management change. They are placed on the performance graph so readers can note whether the change had an impact on growth.

Category Rating

This gauge shows how a fund is rated within its peer group of funds over a three-year period.

Fidelity Growth & Income

Legendary designer Paul Rand filled a notebook with sketches before arriving at the final design. T

Typographic Styling

A standardized system of rules, fonts, type sizes and weights divide and articulate levels of data and information on The Page. This system influences the typographic decisions on other Morningstar products.

Patented Binder Design

Morningstar engaged an industrial design firm to develop a binder that could handle more than a thousand pages of information. The first true binder innovation since 1913, the Morningstar binder lies flat when open and closes easily without having to be shaken to shut properly.

The designers stripped away existing heavy black rules that gave the information a capped, cramped look. They wanted the consistency of a single typeface and set out to find one with all the weights and styles necessary. The font also had to possess a good, clear set of numerals. Serif numbers weren’t right for this kind of data, Burton and Williams agreed. They didn’t want to mix up a sans serif face with serif numbers either. They finally selected Univers, a typeface “that embodies a lot of integrity because in the 1957 original, designer Adrian Frutiger created 21 versions of the type,” Burton says.

“The amount of data influences point size,” he explains. “I tried to use as large a type size as I could without squeezing the type onto the page. You need to have enough air and weight on the page to read, Rules, and how you use them, are dictated by the nature of the information. Serif versus sans serif type, rag versus justified columns? You use what’s best to resolve the problem. The only one absolute is you have to know the problem inside out.”

Eventually, the typographic handling of the data has come to define Morningstar’s corporate image. In addition, the company has incorporated user-friendly details like a star-rating system and pictograms.

“We try to present the information in formats that are appropriate for the type of information,” Williams says. “That means not obscuring what the data is trying to say with a meaningless illustration or an inappropriate graph such as one of those 3-D doughnut graphs. We try to be as clear, appropriate and to the point as possible. That goes for the overall layout of a spread and the presentation of information in the sequence that readers intuitively want to receive it.”

The “page” became compelling proof that design could be a powerful point of difference for Morningstar. “It may be hard to appreciate the true beauty of our page until you actually use it to select a mutual fund,” says Mansueto. “Try picking a fund using it and then try picking a fund without it. You’ll see a huge difference. It’s a wonderful example of strong design.”

The page’s transformation also became a rallying cry around the company. Mansueto upgraded the look of the rest of the business’s packaging, marketing materials, interiors, internal forms, even coffee cups. Turning to the industrial design firm Fitch, Morningstar design manager Robert Soto also set out to create a special binder to accommodate the more than 1,000 pages offered by the company. With such a large volume of sheets, traditional three-ring binders wouldn’t lie flat and it was cumbersome to read and flip through the pages. In addition, when placing the binder back on the shell, customers found that they first had to hold it up and shake vigorously to get the pages in alignment. Fitch’s design received the first new binder patent since the original was created in 1913. “I appreciate that it lies flat and all that,” remarks Burton, “but it also sends a message about the company with regard to its concern for design.”

Last fall, Morningstar began work on its web site. As with the “page,” the problem required a deft balance between diverse elements like data, news, features and user chat areas. Web technology added further challenges affecting navigational ease and user-friendly interactivity. The site, launched in February, quickly

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Joseph Schmidt
Co-Founder and Partner
Joseph Schmidt emigrated to the U.S. in the '60s and worked as a pastry chef until he found his special talent sculpting and developing new techniques in chocolate.

Throughout the world, there are hundreds of thousands of talented craft people, but few ever succeed in taking their business national, especially without compromising the integrity of their product. Even fewer succeed in establishing a distinct brand identity for themselves within a field of legendary global competitors.

Joseph Schmidt Confections, based in San Francisco, is one of those rare exceptions. Since the chocolate company was founded in 1983, it has developed into a multimillion-dollar enterprise, growing steadily at 15-20% a year. Today it produces two million pounds of chocolate confections annually for 7,000 national retail and institutional accounts, and it will soon move into a new 95,000-square-foot manufacturing facility.

What makes Joseph Schmidt products so special is that they look unlike any premium chocolate available. Attractive and irresistible, each piece is sculpted, molded and hand-colored by the confectioner into an edible work of art. Packaged in exquisite hand-crafted boxes, designed by Audrey Ryan, the products communicate exceptional value, even before the first bite. Little wonder that gourmet shops and fine department stores such as Neiman Marcus, Macy's and Sak's Fifth Avenue have been drawn to Joseph Schmidt chocolates. Not only are Schmidt products equal to the finest Belgian chocolates, they present beautifully in catalogs and retail settings. Customers covet the chocolates as objects, and are often torn between displaying them and devouring them.

But making design the brand signature for Schmidt confections initially wasn't a conscious decision. In fact, the idea of specializing in chocolates wasn't part of the original plan either. When Schmidt and Ryan left their pastry chef jobs to start a "cottage" business in their home kitchen, they wanted to bake European-style pastries like petit fours that were hard to find in the U.S. and sell them to local gourmet shops. As an afterthought, they added Belgian chocolate truffles to round out their selection. The runaway success of their truffles, which attracted Neiman Marcus' attention, and the fact that the oven temperature made it impossible to make chocolates and pastries in the same room forced the decision to go with their strongest product.

Interestingly, Ryan was the one with formal chocolate training, but it was Schmidt who fell in love with the medium. Unfamiliar with chocolate traditions, he experimented freely. "In Europe, everyone learns from a master and follows it like a bible," he says. "By not having any [chocolate] training, I didn't have any restrictions over what I could and couldn't do." Ignoring the fact that the European truffle is basically a lump of chocolate with cocoa modeled after the French mushroom truffle, Schmidt decided that the American public would accept a different look. "Americans say, 'Show me something beautiful and I'll try it.' I figured an egg would be a very natural, beautiful shape."

It was but "we didn't have any packaging for the truffles so Joseph started developing these wonderful chocolates by turning each piece into a visual work of art. Using product and packaging design to establish brand distinction, the 14-year-old firm is producing sales of more than $10 million this year and is ranked among the premiere chocolatiers in the world."
bouls out of chocolate,” says Ryan. Working with dark, milk and white chocolates and food dyes, Schmidt created colorful loto-flower-shaped bowls that were as smooth and delicate as porcelain. Beautiful and intriguing, the edible bowls caused shoppers to stop in their tracks. The local sweet shop that was coaxed into taking a few on consignment came back for six dozen more the next day and 20 dozen soon after. “Initially, we needed something to hold the product, but the boxes became conversation pieces stimulating word-of-mouth sales,” Schmidt explains. His early experiments with bowls also gave him the opportunity to discover the malleable qualities of chocolate. “Chocolate is the most fun material in the food business,” he says. “It gets soft quickly, you play with it, and in a few minutes, it’s hard as a rock.” Like a kid turned loose in a chocolate factory, Schmidt let his imagination soar. He used molds to make turkeys, Santas, Nutcracker soldiers and honey bears, air brushing and hand-painting them so that they look more like toy figures than food. He created tulip cups and swan bowls and sculpted multicolored flowers and butterflies.

Working on a grander scale, he designed elaborate life-size exhibits, sculpting whole villages, flowers and trees, objects and people, out of up to 10,000 pounds of chocolate. Exhibited as artwork in such places as the American Crafts Museum in New York, his creations have attracted global media attention as well as special commissions for events honoring dignitaries ranging from Nelson Mandela to the Queen of England. Ongoing media interest, particularly around holidays and Valentine’s Day, has garnered Joseph Schmidt enough publicity to forego any advertising. But the “profit is not in the art,” Schmidt admits. “You need a ‘razor blade,’ something you can sell a lot of. Something smaller that you can train other people to make. Then you can do magnificent pieces to enhance and make a name for yourself.” Joseph Schmidt’s “razor blade” is the truffle, of which the company produced 14 million large-size truffles last year. More recently, the firm introduced Slicks, a flat, cream-filled medallion decorated with swirls of color.

Schmidt and Ryan also recognized that their strengths were on the creative side of the product and brought in two business partners – an industrial manufacturing engineer formerly from Nestle’s restaurant division and a former sales executive from Godiva Chocolates. While they run the business side, Schmidt and Ryan focus on the side they like most. “We wanted to be able to control the growth and still have fun with what we are doing,” Ryan explains. “Basically we were always in the kitchen, playing around. We didn’t want to be bothered with all the marketing.” While Schmidt constantly experiments with new chocolate ideas, Ryan has been equally busy designing...
The Art of Chocolate
There is virtually nothing that Joseph Schmidt can't make entirely out of chocolate. Blending food dyes into white chocolate, he sculptures a delightful bouquet of tulips. His chocolate boxes, made to hold smaller chocolate pieces, come in every form, including stars and vegetables.

Commissioned Products
Many companies commission Joseph Schmidt to produce special products for their own retail and catalog sales. The star (left) was made for Starbucks; these dinosaurs for The Nature Company, and Mickey Mouse (below) for Disney.

The Seven Seasons of Chocolate
To keep products fresh and encourage retail stores to display them year-around, Joseph Schmidt produces seven seasonal lines a year.

Christmas
Valentine's Day
Easter
Mother's Day
Father's Day
Summer
Autumn

Molded Chocolates
Joseph Schmidt exhibits his true artistry through the amazing detail in his molded chocolate figures. Each chocolate color is applied in reverse to the mold and allowed to harden before the next color is added.
and developing the packaging. One reason they decided to create hand-crafted packaging was because some of the delicate chocolate designs didn’t travel well.

"[Retailers] all wanted the art pieces but we couldn’t ship them. So, we tried to put some of the artwork of the chocolate into the package," Ryan explains.

Today Ryan’s hand-made, hand-painted boxes, produced in India, the Philippines and Mexico, are as sought after as the candies inside. On promotional tours, Ryan is often asked to autograph the boxes, which are becoming collectibles in themselves. The company’s brand identity is now as much in the boxes as they are in the products. Here again, they broke away from European chocolate traditions. “In Europe, it is the opposite extreme,” says Ryan. “They don’t want to have different boxes. They feel comfortable having the same box for 20 years because it gives their product an identity.”

With Joseph Schmidt Confections, retailers are drawn to the visual excitement of constantly changing decorative boxes. “They like us because our products decorate the store,” says Schmidt. “Sales are fantastic. Stores depend on us to generate sales.”

Ryan adds, “We bring larger segments into the stores during the holidays. When we started out, maybe they would give us one shelf and a case. That has evolved into six cases. Over time, they have come to recognize our strength.”

Because of this, Ryan says that a lot of stores have asked for products earlier: “They want us to bring Christmas in in September, but we don’t want our chocolate products around that long.” To maintain year-around sales and retail visibility, Joseph Schmidt develops packaging and products around seven seasonal themes, including summer, Father’s Day and Mother’s Day. Intermixed with these handmade seasonal packages are commercially manufactured boxes. Designed by Barbara Mulhauser, these boxes have also won packaging awards.

Although Joseph Schmidt Confections has been profitable from day-one, Ryan and Schmidt say that it took the better part of ten years to win the complete confidence of retail customers. “We had to develop a track record, prove that we are always on time, always delivering. If they want to double the business, we can match it, with no disasters,” Schmidt says.

“In the past, we had to fight to get them to increase their budget, to keep us in stock during the holidays when people purchase. If they sold out of our product in one week, that was it. They hadn’t budgeted to buy more. What is happening now is that they are allocating money for our company and building us into their budget.”

Although Schmidt and Ryan recognize that visual appeal has played a large role in their market success, they emphasize that the quality has to be in the product as well. “I use the best ingredients possible,” Schmidt says. “It is very disappointing to see beautiful food and find it tastes terrible. Then it is doubly disappointing. I don’t want to disappoint people.”

Schmidt and Ryan are also determined not to lose sight of the reasons they began their business. “Money isn’t the driver,” says Schmidt.

“The love is there for the product,” Ryan adds. “We didn’t start out to build a business, but to have fun with what we are doing.” For them, the fact that Joseph Schmidt Confections has turned into a phenomenal commercial success is just the icing on their cake.
Alphabet Soup You don't always need to see the whole word to recognize the name of the brand. One letter will do. Used effectively, a distinctive logotype becomes the corporate signature. That is why many companies commission the design of a unique typeface, or wordmark, that incorporates clues to their line of business or operating philosophy. Other companies have adopted an off-the-shelf typeface that they have made their own through the use of designated corporate colors, upper or lower case styling, condensed or expanded leading and other techniques. As with any branding tool, a logotype must be used consistently and frequently to work. Test your familiarity with some of the best-known logotypes by naming the brand that goes with each letter in this alphabet.
Communicating on the Fly

Following a devastating fire, Germany’s Düsseldorf airport urgently needed a clear, easy-to-read signage system. Traveler safety and ease of movement were key considerations, along with establishing a distinct identity for the airport.

The worst airport fire in German history occurred on April 11, 1996, when flames broke out in the busy Düsseldorf airport, quickly filling the terminal with acrid, toxic smoke. Travelers frantically looked for exit signs. In the ensuing chaos, 17 people died and 150 were injured.

A spokesman for the Düsseldorf fire brigade, quoted in European news accounts, blamed the high number of casualties on passengers “ignoring” emergency exit signs.

For airport management, having the signage singled out as a contributor to the disaster underscored the importance of maintaining a clear communications system in a crowded, public space. Prior to the fire, signage at Düsseldorf had become a clutter of airline logos and retail and service ads, with directional signs lost in the cacophony. “After our fire disaster, we knew we needed to make better signage and we needed to show passengers that Düsseldorf was making a fresh start,” says Olaf Ehlbrecht, a strategic planner at the airport. “We wanted to create an image that shows that we are creating something new and better than our former days.”

To do so, Düsseldorf airport management turned to MetaDesign in Berlin. Founded by renowned typographer Erik Spiekermann, MetaDesign is Germany’s largest design firm and is fast developing an international reputation for its process-driven systems design. It was earlier commissioned to develop the new graphic standards for the complex public transportation system in reunified Berlin.

Düsseldorf airport management first looked to MetaDesign to develop temporary signage so the airport could keep operating. In fact, just days after the fire, the airport reopened in makeshift tents and hangars, while workers began reconstructing damaged parts of the terminal. With the summer holiday season approaching, Germany’s largest charter airport in the Ruhr Valley would soon see tourist traffic swell from around 20,000 a day to 70,000. MetaDesign had six weeks to implement a signage system.

Its immediate assignment was to create signage that would be usable in the temporary quarters and then in the building corridors as the terminal gradually reopened. MetaDesign had to keep in mind that the interim system would be the basis for permanent signage, once it was decided whether to upgrade the old terminal or build a new one.

Another consideration was the competitive environment brought on by deregulation of Europe’s airline industry. Düsseldorf airport was beginning to compete with airports like Frankfurt, 300 kilometers (187 miles) away, and Amsterdam, just 250 kilometers (156 miles) away. Until recently, most German airports had shared similar ’70s architecture, and the same interior and signage color palette. But eight years ago, Munich opened...
a new airport, with a lighter, open-space plan featuring lots of glass and steel. It also broke from the pack with signs in white type on a light blue background, a key identity element. Other German airports followed suit. Stuttgart initiated a system using white type against dark gray; Frankfurt, white type against royal blue. “Düsseldorf had no recognizable identity,” says MetaDesign partner Bruno Schmidt. “Also because of so many prominent red-and-white LTU charter service signs, it had become known as the ITU airport.”

MetaDesign convinced airport management that the new signage had to be part of a larger identity system. “At first they saw us only as sign makers,” Schmidt says. “But we explained that travelers need to recognize Düsseldorf from the moment they pick up their tickets from the travel agent. That required a whole new system of information.”

With the six-week deadline looming, MetaDesign sent eight staffers to live at the airport, with support from colleagues back in Berlin. The Düsseldorf team worked 18 hours a day, seven days a week, in a noisy, hot hangar. A Berlin production company was sent in to manufacture signs taken straight from designs on MetaDesign’s computer screens.

The MetaDesign team used video and still cameras to analyze the airport’s existing point of entry, departure and transportation, service and safety routes. From there, they developed nine navigational scenarios based on people arriving or leaving from various directions by car, taxi or underground train.

Over the years, Düsseldorf airport has been enlarged through piecemeal extensions. The result was a layout where passengers often have to travel long distances to get to a plane. People arriving by train, for instance, have to maneuver across train platforms and through tunnels to get to steps leading to check-in counters above ground. Passengers arriving by car have to be alerted on the autobahn as to which airport exit to take, then navigate through various arrival/departure exits on airport grounds to find the appropriate parking area. From there, the check-in counter is a one-kilometer (3/4 mile) trek.

“If you work at an airport every day, you don’t think about these problems the way an outsider would,” says Schmidt. “You need to get information to travelers exactly when they need it, not too early, not too late. You also need to build in enough redundancies to make people comfortable, to take them by the hand and guide them through a building that may be totally unfamiliar to them.” But not too many redundancies.

“We had 1,500 existing signs to analyze,” adds MetaDesign’s Michael Boeck. “We discovered more than half were redundant and had little effective purpose. The signage system was absolutely chaotic, with airlines putting their logos everywhere. You’d arrive at the airport and try to figure out which direction were arrivals and departures, and all you’d see were signs for Lufthansa, British Airways and LTU.”

MetaDesign developed a structural hierarchy for the new signage system, and created a matrix of information, determined by immediate importance. For instance, Departure signs are shown before Arrivals, since those passengers were likely to be in a greater hurry. Concurrently, it analyzed typefaces, colors and pictogram options. There was no time “to test alternative arrangements, look at different sizes of signs and, most importantly, be more involved in the actual editing of message content and their placement.”
DESIGN AND BUSINESS CLASSIC: CRAYOLA

For millions of people, Crayola crayons symbolize a rite of passage from toddlerhood to childhood. These waxy colored chalks, packaged in the familiar green-and-yellow box, are nearly every child's first drawing tool. Thought of so fondly, Crayola is one of the 20 most recognizable smells in the world. Since its introduction in 1938, more than 100 billion crayons have been sold — enough to circle the globe four and a half times if the sticks were laid end-to-end.

Crayola's inventors, Binney & Smith of Pennsylvania, originally manufactured red oxide pigments used to paint barns red and carbon black pigments used by the Goodrich Tire Company to turn the then-common white tires black. Following these successes, Binney & Smith began producing slate pencils and dustless chalk for schools, but seeing a need for better, more affordable wax crayons, the company adapted its industrial marking chalk for children. Brightly colored and shaped for small hands, the crayons (named Crayola from the French words for oily chalk) were an instant hit. Even during the Great Depression of the 1930s, demand continued, and the company hired local farm families to hand-label crayons. Each farm became associated with a different color name. This tradition continued for many years, supplementing the winter income of farmers.

Today more than 200 million Crayola crayons are sold annually in 60 countries. From its original eight colors, the Crayola palette has grown to 90. Otherwise virtually unchanged since 1933, Crayolas have outlived nearly every toy fad and seem likely to delight children for generations to come.

Pottlatch Corporation has long been a proponent of using quality design to create corporate identity, enhance credibility, and establish distinction. Among the many design services the company offers is the printing of premium coated printing papers available today. Selection of gloss, dull, velvetc, silk, and matte finishes for fine coatings, as well as the printing in sheets or rolls, is made possible by the use of fine recycled papers. In addition to setting the standard in printing paper quality, Pottlatch's printing paper line has earned International Standards Organization (ISO) certification, a rating verifying its manufacturing product is recognized worldwide.

Pottlatch Design Foundation is a nonprofit educational and research organization whose mission is to improve the quality of life and work of organizations through design. The Foundation is an information source conducting research, developing teaching materials, and organizing conferences, exhibitions, and workshops.

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Crayola’s inventor, Binney & Smith of Pennsylvania, originally manufactured red oxide pigments used to glaze barns red, and carbon black pigments used by the Fire Company to turn the then-common white firehouses black. Following these successes, Binney & Smith began producing colorless pencils and dustless chalk for schools, but sales were slow.

Potlatch Corporation

The sponsor of @issue, Potlatch Corporation has long been a proponent of the use of quality design to create corporate identity, promote products and establish credibility and distinction among key consumer and business audiences.

At mills in northern Minnesota, Potlatch manufactures the broadest line of premium coated printing papers available today, including a selection of gloss, dull, velvet, silk and matte finishes and a choice of fine recycled papers. In addition to setting the standard for coated printing paper quality, Potlatch’s printing paper operations have earned International Standards Organization (ISO) 9002 certification, a rating verifying its manufacturing product quality system is recognized worldwide.

Corporate Design Foundation

Corporate Design Foundation is a nonprofit educational and research organization whose mission is to improve the quality of life and the effectiveness of organizations through design. The Foundation concentrates its efforts in conducting research, developing teaching materials, and collaborating with business school faculty to introduce product design, communication design, and building design into the business school curriculum.

@issue: The Journal of Business & Design is specifically published for business leaders and business school students to communicate examples of how and why design impacts business.

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