

Brand(ish)ing

Not since the days of real Marlboro Men chasing herds of cattle with hot pokers has the word “branding” been so widely used in everyday parlance. It seems wherever one turns today, there are companies slaving feverishly to “build a brand” or to impel consumers somehow to “invest in the brand.” Since much of what Ph.D does is to create identities for clients whose focus ranges in scope from film production to lighting fixtures to the development of complex computer code, we thought it was time to take a look at this word “branding” and decide what it means to us. Then, if put on the spot at a cocktail party, or worse—a client meeting, we might then be able to explain our own approach to designing corporate identities. Or, to put it in user-friendly new-millennium terms, we decided to ask ourselves: how does Ph.D “build a brand?”

We don’t pore through demographic data, draw pie charts or matrices (not even quite sure what that last one is.) We don’t require a client’s mission statement, a discourse on their strategic goals or detailed analysis of their

do we employ black magic, raindances, or offer prayers that we might get it right. then? Clive believes that is something that shows and where you’ve been.” truly reflects the character carefully to the clients’ that communicates what to be. A Ph.D-designed statement, or an entire says it exactly the same way twice. For clients who are willing to make a unique statement about themselves and will trust their ideas about themselves to be interpreted and transformed by design, Ph.D is an excellent fit. One can look at Ph.D’s longstanding relationship with its Torrance-based client DevelopMentor and its President Mike Abercrombie to see how this attitude and approach has worked over the long haul.



customer base. Then again, neither

sleight-of-hand, voodoo,

for dumb luck

So, what is it

“A good brand

where you’re going

To design an identity that

of a company means listening

story and making a visual translation

they do, who they are, and what they aspire

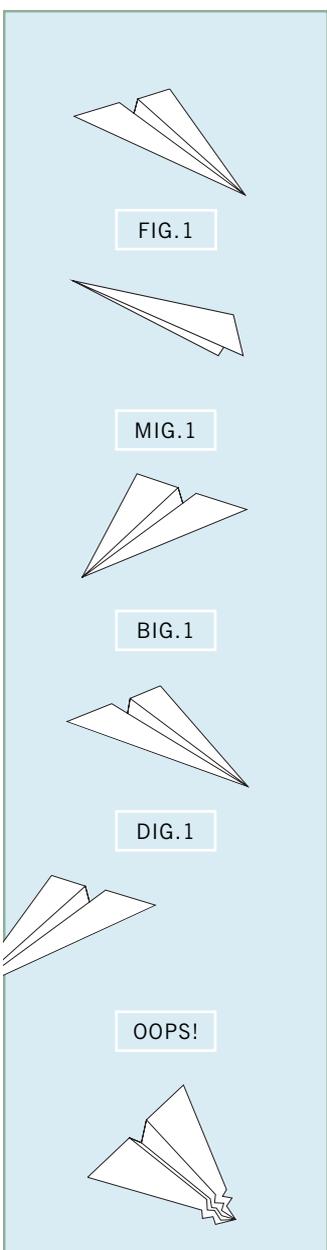
identity might be one simple and concise graphic

language that consistently declares who you are, but never

*The Knowledge is an offering from Ph.D designed to engage the intellect and attract the eye. Issued in charmingly erratic intervals, its sole purpose is to entertain and inform by featuring subjects of interest to the aesthetically-minded. We believe that the complete thought is not yet dead, and hope you will find in our musings a welcome respite from the daily grind.



Consider the paper airplane. That’s what Ph.D and DevelopMentor have been doing over the course of their 7-year association, applying one twist after another to the familiar form. The plane in its simplest state became the mark for DevelopMentor early on. Ph.D suggested the icon because it seemed to best capture the free-spirited nature of the company, whose business profile and subsequent visual presence is unique in the highly specialized and technical arena of training software developers to write computer code. The relationship between Ph.D



and DevelopMentor is also unusual in that Ph.D has worked with the company since its start-up days as a two-person operation and continues to drive its graphic identity in its current incarnation, which includes its Torrance headquarters plus two domestic training facilities and a UK campus site. In the early days, much of Ph.D’s designs for DevelopMentor were created with modest budgets in mind, but Ph.D was able to make a virtue of this factor, rather than allowing it be a creative limitation. But as DevelopMentor grew in size, the identity also evolved, and the airplane manifested a life of its own, morphing from a construct of elegant lines to such unexpected states as a stylized tissue, a piping hot slice of pizza, and a hidden architectural form in a byzantine Escher-esque illustration.

The knowledge of one another’s organization and the kind of shorthand that develops in a long-term working relationship such as this one is important, but what really drives the success of this particular enterprise is an understanding and appreciation between the two parties of what each half brings to the equation. Mike Abercrombie says he realized it was important for him to resist the impulse to describe premeditated design concepts to Ph.D. He chose instead simply to include the studio in marketing discussions at an early stage so that Michael and Clive could

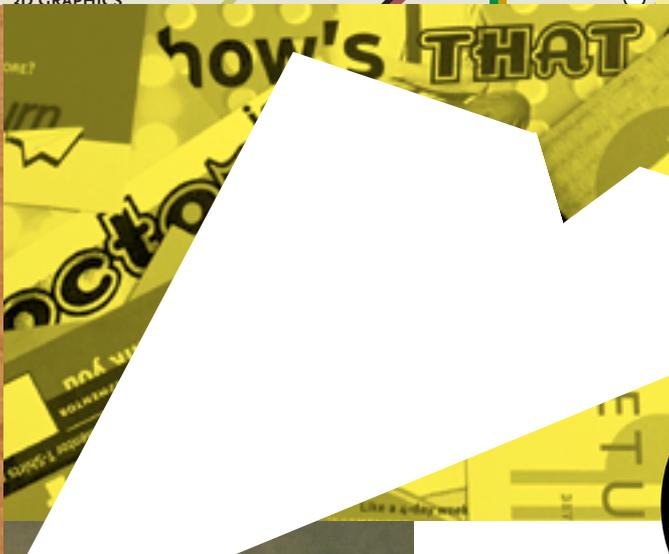


deliver idea-driven design solutions to their client. DevelopMentor grew not only to appreciate what the designers could contribute by working in this way, they came to rely on Ph.D’s ability to consistently infuse the work with extra personality, humor and intelligence that did not exist in the brand materials of their competitors. Mike says Ph.D seems to have the ability “to always be ahead of the curve, presenting designs with a particular shape or color or typeface to me 6 months or a year before I start seeing anyone else doing it.” Abercrombie also appreciates that

Evolution of a Brand: From promotional condoms to programming conferences, web pages to lobby walls, and business cards

to books, Ph.D’s work for DevelopMentor runs the gamut of themes and methods of transmission. The paper airplane logo is

continually travelling over new graphic landscapes, but managing always to set down in a spot that seems fittingly like home.



www.phdla.com

Print ads, brochures, exhibit booths, point-of-purchase displays, packaging, identities, promotional films, motion graphics, book design, CD covers, with a reverence for type, delight in color, and dedication to humor and subtlety.

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“Ph.D’s work always contains a signature design element, but at the same time, also always looks like DevelopMentor.” For Ph.D, the long relationship has allowed the studio to a create a wide extended family of ideas that all relate, and to build a wealth of themes from which to draw upon over time. The opportunity to grow with this client has also yielded growth within the studio—as Clive says, “I’ve made breakthroughs in my own design work on behalf of DevelopMentor.”



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