# Evolution of Some High Profile Identities

**Learning from Others**

Nobody can live long enough to learn solely from making one's own mistakes and expect to have learned very much before dying. It is wiser to try to learn from the successes and mistakes of others. It is wiser to try to learn from the successes and mistakes of others. It's less painful and learning what works and what doesn't can happen much faster.

**Corporate Logo Evolution**

The identities of large companies have changed over time, almost always gravitating toward simpler, more elegant designs, and usually conforming to the core principles that will be discussed later in this book. Many companies have

a long history of attempting to refine their identity. If we look at their progression from one identity to another and compare, we can see some consistent trends.

These companies have worked hard to get their respective identities just right. Each change represents not only the combined efforts of dozens, if not hundreds, of individuals, but also a massive expenditure of resources.



John Deere logos: 1876, 1912, 1936, 1937, 1950, 1956, 1968, 2000

Through more than a hundred years of evolution, superfluous content is eliminated in the John Deere logo; realism is exchanged for stylization; elements are made simpler and more powerful.



Texaco logos: 1901, 1907, 1909, 1913, 1941, 1974, 1981, 1999

Texaco's identity has been trendy at times but simplicity and clarity win in the end.



Apple logos: Original 1976, Also 1976, 1982, 1998 to now, Jelly Colors 1999, 2001-2007, 2007 to now

The pre-Victorian first logo for Apple Computers didn't last even one year. The elegant apple logo was designed in 1976 by Rob Janoff. After that, the rainbow colors were omitted along with the trendy type (such type always goes out-of-date quickly). All the changes since then have been treatments; they have been supplemental to the basic flat color logo, but have never replaced it. Even today on the Apple website, it's the simple, one-color logo that is used, not the treatments.



Westinghouse logos: 1886, 1900, 1921, 1936, 1960 (Paul Rand)

Here the progression is ever simpler, cleaner, more direct. Note that Westinghouse changed its logo every 15 to 25 years. Then Paul Rand designed a new logo for Westinghouse, and it has remained virtually unchanged since 1960. Why? Because identities that are designed according to core principles don't become dated.

What are the common design trends that these case studies show?

First and foremost, clarity and ease of recognition are paramount. These are absolute baseline requirements. Over and over, the designs prove one overriding principle: nothing can compensate for lack of clarity. Those who think that clarity is somehow passé are smoking something that's messing with their heads. Without legibility, nothing else matters. If people cannot see and recognize the brand, the design is a failure, pure and simple.

Next are twin qualities that are also indispensable in corporate-identity design: flexibility and continuity.



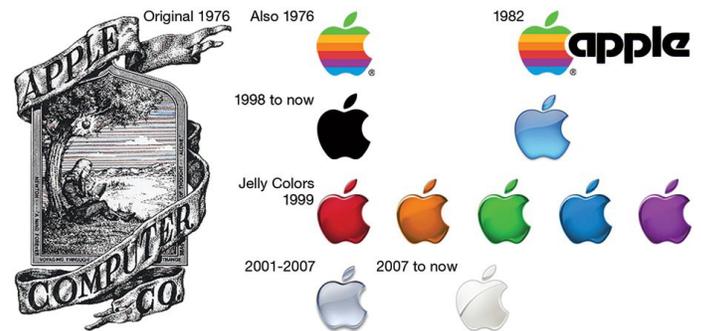Shell logos: 1900, 1904, 1909, 1930, 1948, 1955, 1961, 1971, 1995, 1999

Rather than becoming harder to recognize by being stylized, if done properly, images become clearer. Beginning with photo-like realism, these logos became increasingly stylized until Raymond Lowey made a perfect Shell logo in 1971. The typography, however, was too trendy and was replaced with a less dated font. Then in 1999 the company omitted the signature portion. Very few companies can ever do that.

Over and over again we see that simplicity triumphs over complexity, one color over multiple colors, and timeless designs over trendy ones.