

Five easy ways to improve your professional image – even when you're a one man show

One piece of advice I have never forgotten makes a lot of sense: 80% of business success comes down to these three things: Say “Please” and “Thank You”; be on time; and do what you said you will do. I’ve always thought that was not a bad definition of being professional. However, there are a number of more mundane things that can spoil your whole image if you don’t take care of them.

Logo Design

If you are going to have a logo as a graphical representation of your business, it’s critical that it looks the same wherever you use it, so you get the full benefit of branding. However, as a practical matter, you will actually need different files for different applications. Either you or your graphic designer will need to create versions for a web-site (which will also do for e-mail) one or possibly two sizes for printed publications, and maybe a large size for lawn signs, car decals or other advertising. The worst mistake you can make is to design a logo in a (low) web-site resolution first, and then attempt to use it for high-quality printed items. It will look terrible. A rule of thumb is to use a vector-based graphics package for the design work, and convert to a pixel-based (bitmap) image in the right size as required.

Wordmark

If your logo doesn’t include your business name, you will probably print the name beside your logo. When this takes on a distinctive look, it is often called a wordmark. Choose a specific position, font and colour you will use for this purpose, and be consistent in always making your wordmark look the same wherever it is used. If the font is not one that you can expect to find on all computers, then in e-mails and web-sites, you will use an image (e.g. a gif graphic) of the wordmark and when you publish in a PDF you will embed the font so it will appear as you expected. (You’re also best to choose a font that you can distribute without running afoul of copyright laws!)

Colours

When a graphics professional talks about colours and the printing process, listen up! Some colours which look fine on a computer screen do not translate well at the printer’s. Some blues, in particular, will look quite different. An expert will be able to save you before you choose a Corporate Blue which you can never reproduce on paper. An expert will also advise on the psychological impact of colours, as well as

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how they “go” together—something I rely on my wife to tell me! Once you have your colours, use them consistently.

Business Cards

With those details attended to, you can think about your business card. My personal bias is against self-printed ones. When it’s possible to get professional full-colour, glossy, photo-quality cards for under \$30, I say, go for it. I use a print service where I can upload my design and still add and edit text. The one thing I’d do differently next time is to include only the graphic elements in the upload. That would allow me to change an e-mail address or phone number without another upload charge.

Contact details

With all of these image-makers going for you, how do you think it looks when your e-mail address is joesmith23@cheap.mail.com? Even if you won’t be doing e-business, a web-site is almost a necessity these days. Get one, so clients can learn a bit about you before calling. Having your own domain gives you a unique e-mail address as well, and if you change your internet provider, your e-mail can stay the same. Naturally, the best time to do this is *before* you print up all of your business stationary!

A professional image—don’t leave your home office without one!