

DESIGN EXPRESS

The graphic services newsletter for promotional products pros



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SMALL BUSINESSES MUST BE BOLD BRANDS TOO



Often when we hear about the concept of “the brand” in the business press, the focus tends to be on huge companies. In the late 20th century, it was firms that dominated their markets with high-quality, specialized yet mass-produced products that just about everyone used from brands such as **Kodak** and **M&M Mars**.

Some brands **offered things we aspired to, like Mercedes-Benz**, while **MetLife made insurance more personable** and less boring thanks to Snoopy. All the while, it was small businesses that were (and still are) the backbone of the United States economy.

Perhaps thinking is different in the 21st century. Having a strong brand, whether a firm is known globally or locally, is no longer the sole domain of multinational corporations.

Branding and Everything Else

Some experts say there is a distinct difference between brands and marketing. Simply having websites, running print ads and engaging on social media is great for businesses when done right, but it doesn't in itself constitute a coherent brand. However, doing all those things is a good start and often small businesses just need to tie these activities all together.

According to *Inc.* magazine writer Laurel Mintz, who covered the topic in a recent *Chicago Tribune* post, **good branding involves a strong visual element**.

QUICK NEWSLETTER SURVEY

Would you recommend this newsletter?

Nope ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☒ 5 For sure

UPCOMING EVENTS

ASI Show!

Orlando, FL

January 19-20

Exhibiting, Booth #1347

PPAI Expo

Las Vegas, NV

January 10-12

Attending

ASI Show!

Dallas, TX

February 2-3

Exhibiting, Booth #1048

PPAI Expo East / ISS

Atlantic City, NJ

March 23-25

Exhibiting

EMPLOYEES WEAR BRANDS WELL

“A great work uniform not only makes your employees feel and look good, but it also **increases positive brand recognition and company image**, and helps promote safety in the workplace,” writes *PPB Magazine*, a publication of the Promotional Products Association International.

On branding she writes, “This area of marketing includes the visual elements of a company. It includes everything from the logo to the color theory and how the logo is used on different marketing collateral, which is just a fancy name for websites, business cards, letterhead, etc.”

Mintz goes on to say that much of what makes brands strong are **visual elements including colors and shapes**, as well as distinct and repeated words associated with the visuals that brands put forth. Moreover, typefaces or fonts as well as abstract elements come to play in establishing brands in consumers’ minds.

Meanwhile, the visual elements of brands must point to something concrete and discernible about businesses. That’s where SMBs’ stories and presenting them authentically become, with visuals, the underlying part of brand concepts.

Authenticity is Essential and Easy

With all that in mind, it is also important to talk about what brands say about the companies they represent. Certainly brands aren’t just collections of colors, shapes and spiffy fonts thrown together.

Social Times tackled the topic of brands from a social media point of view. The web’s best known social media publication didn’t talk about so much about what to post on company Facebook pages, Twitter accounts or Instagram channels. **Instead it was all about telling a story — and one that is authentic.**

The post’s author Sherry Gray explains: “Whether we realize it or not, we tend to place more trust in people who are similar to us in some way. This extends to how we engage with marketing and on social media — we’re more likely to feel positively about a company talking our own language, run by people like us.”

By finding the right tone for conversations about their businesses, and being consistent about the marketing messages released, companies can build “familiar faces” with their ideal audiences and customer bases.

Looks and Feel

As an expert in helping SMBs brand, Idea Custom Solutions aims to make the process of logo design and branding easy. This summer, we published an infographic which lays out **a few distinct types of logos**. Some companies prefer to let the name of their companies stand out in letters, while others opt for “emblem” style logos with the shapes relevant to something about their businesses.

Whatever you and your customers favor in terms of shapes, styles, colors and fonts, it helps to consult branding specialists in order **to properly articulate and convey the messages for future customers** and the world at large.

Business Insider points out that many of the most well-known **major corporations have begun to phase out letters and words altogether**, perhaps following the lead of brands like Target. Yet regardless of where your company starts, it’s normal to update or alter logos from time to time. In the media space alone, both *Fortune Magazine* and *National*

That’s certainly true. But also remember that a prominent logo on shirts, outwear or other apparel gets the name and brand of companies or institutions out there for all to see.

If the SMBs that you serve supply uniforms for work associates — or even if they give away hats, shirts and other wearable items to their teams — keep in mind that **Idea Custom Solutions delivers the best in embroidery digitizing.**

In addition to wearables, many **businesses like to offer new employees** the ever popular employee **welcome kit**. These kits, which you can assemble for SMBs, educational institutions, or even large companies, usually come stocked with classic promotional products, including quality branded pens, notebooks and other office items. Some give out accessories such as metal water bottles, music headphones and even toys (like Frisbees, balls or bobbleheads).

Regardless of the products you sell, vector artwork from Idea Custom Solutions will quickly and cost-effectively transform raster artwork from your SMBs so that logos can be imprinted properly.

Beyond uniforms and welcome kits, educate your customers how the wearables and hard goods they chose can even help them make the most of events. *Fast Company* points out how team gatherings create perfect opportunities for **companies to promote their brands while reinforcing their missions.**

“Hand out branded T-shirts, beach towels, and water bottles before (each) outing,” writes *Fast Company* contributor Lisa Roepe. “Encourage employees to proudly wear their swag.”

It doesn’t matter if it’s the summer company picnic, a charity golf outing or just a few employees participating in local walk-a-

Geographic have remained impeccable brands while tweaking their logos' shapes and adjoining typefaces several times over the last decades.

If you're hesitant where to begin for your company or for clients, working with an outside expert such as *Idea Custom Solutions* can help any company modernize their brand, especially SMBs. Energizing brands is easier than you think. And it is an essential task in today's bustling business landscape.

DRINK UP TO GREAT PROMOTIONS

Last fall *Eater*, a prominent online magazine that covers everything culinary from fancy food brands and the charm of local diners to flatware, hotel bar matchbooks and promotional accessories, made an interesting declaration.

The publication dished out a brief narrative of the koozie, naming this cylindrical and often foam-based drink holder that was specifically designed to keep beverage cans and bottles chilled “America’s favorite beer companion”.

Supposedly this now-classic drink holder, which is also known to some as the “beer cozy”, “beer jacket”, or “drink huggie”, has a legendary and elusive history. According to *Eater*, this simple contraption for keeping drinks cold and hands warm originated in Australia before crossing oceans.

“In America, the koozie didn’t rise to prominence until the synthetic-material-loving, brand-happy 1980s,” *Eater*’s Sarah Baird writes. “The first iteration (known as an ‘insulated drink cozy’) was patented by Idahoan Bonnie McGough in 1981 and specifically designed for use ‘with cold drinking utensils such as a 12-ounce beverage can.’”

Whether McGough intended for the koozie to be a mass-market hit on the shelves of every Wal-Mart or mom-and-pop shop nationwide is not known. And while there are no hard statistics from the Advertising Specialty Institute (ASI) yet on the koozie’s reach and usage, somehow it has become a favorite promotional product offering.

Beer holders, koozies or whatever you want call them have long been popular giveaways at trade shows and events. Beverage companies, bars, restaurants and even small businesses outside the food and beverage sector have stirred up sales of these promo products.

Drink Things by the Numbers

Of course, drinkware and drink-related accessories is a no-brainer for any company in the beverage industry. But consumers easily cozy up to drink products too. Users stock up on branded drinkware in part because it is free. In addition, according to page 11 of ASI’s Impressions Study report, consumers believe the style and look of the free drinkware is as important as the fact that they will use it at least two to three times a week.

Taking a look at *ASI’s latest infographic on drinkware*, we noticed a couple of important points:

thons. Marketing experts say that just getting your employees engaged in community efforts not only provides a perfect reason for them to “wear the brand”, they also spread organizations’ goodwill and reputation throughout communities.

Ultimately, whether they need work wear or giveaways for special events, make sure your customers in business know their options and that their employees can serve as the best possible brand ambassadors with your help.

NOTABLE QUOTES



“You cannot shake hands with a clenched fist.”

— Indira Gandhi



“In the madness, you have to find calm.”

— Lupita Nyong'o

- 21 percent of U.S. consumers own and use branded drinkware. In some places like Phoenix, Arizona, where the weather is warmer all year, the use is much higher.
- 39 percent own a promotional coffee mug, an item widely used both at home and work.
- 24 percent of women own drinkware, suggesting free cups and bottles are more popular with women than men.

Drink is Just Part of Life

We mentioned in this issue that a number of sectors from advertising to high tech firms offer "welcome kits" for new employees. *Digiday* cited that useful items like coffee cups are a standard part of the mix, while some lucky company newbies might end up with a logoed water bottles or mugs, and even branded bottles of wine. It seems that, throughout corporate America, beverages and their accessories are always top-of-mind.

Some of the impetus behind the expanding use of water and beverage bottles comes from interest in keeping hydrated, even while on the go. At the same time, drinking accessories — especially the ones that keep liquids cold — venture way outside the office suite. For example, drink cups, mini coolers and other reusable items are a key part of camping and picnicking sets.

Just as there is an enduring interest from consumers in low-tech favorites like bottle openers, *Small Biz Trends* noted this year that another retro item, the drink coaster, has found a new place doubling as a smartphone holder.

While major corporations can invest marketing tactics such as billboards, newspaper print ads and TV/radio advertising, such methods are out of reach for SMBs. For them, using everyday items like drinkware to keep their brands in mind and at hand at all times is much smarter.

Look to Idea Custom Solutions as you serve your SMB customers who are looking for smart and simple ways to promote their brands. We have worked in the promotional products industry since our founding. Our goal has always been to help distributors serve tens of millions SMBs with the best variety and quality.

SPORTS: A GREAT WAY FOR SMBS TO BOOST THEIR BRANDS

This year, sports history was made. After 108 years without a championship, the Chicago Cubs won the World Series, in a contentious and exciting seven-game battle with the Cleveland Indians. We knew before the first pitch was thrown that sports excite people.

That's probably why suppliers of t-shirts, caps and other garments have always seen steady business in wearable promotional products. Small and medium-sized businesses (SMBs), as well as larger brands, realize that consumers love sports. There is often no better way to get the word out about businesses than to link them to home town favorites.

As *promo magazine* pointed out in an article recently, merchandise for the Chicago Cubs has sold five times more this season than that of other



"Most great people have attained their greatest success just one step beyond their greatest failure."

— Napoleon Hill



"You have to, in some ways, trust in the human spirit and in human ingenuity."

— Ariel Garten



"Success is no accident. It is hard work, perseverance, learning, studying, sacrifice and most of all, love of what you are doing or learning to do."

— Pele



"I love deadlines. I like the whooshing sound they make as they fly by."

— Douglas Adams

Major League Baseball franchises. Despite last week's celebration parade, which was allegedly the **seventh largest gathering in human history**, *promo magazine* contends that the rise in sales isn't because the Cubs have the most fans. It has more to do with the excitement around a momentous event.

"It's not just that there are more Cubs fans than other fans. It really does have to do with fans rallying behind a potential World Series win. Over the last two years, sales have more than doubled each year for the Cubs, and the Indians saw an increase of 269 percent this year over last year."

However, it could be that teams being on upswings has something to do with it. "The statistics also showed that teams that did better during the regular season moved more branded items online. The Indians, for example, saw 62 percent of its merchandise sales in October alone," *promo magazine* wrote.

Earlier this year, the Advertising Specialty Institute identified a similar scenario at the end of "March Madness", the NCAA men's college basketball tournament. The eventual victor Villanova won its first championship in 31 years. While they didn't sell as many shirts as the Cubs, what did happen is that SMBs — especially those in the greater Philadelphia area — **tapped into the momentum of enthusiasm for Villanova basketball's landmark season**. Businesses such as TD Bank offered everything from buttons to pennants, and Dunkin' Donuts even released a promotional branded Dunkin'/Villanova perks card.

Across the country in Texas, Ford Motor Company this fall issued a **limited edition version of the Ford F-150 emblazoned with the Dallas Cowboys' logo** and blue-grey color scheme of the Dallas Cowboys. This line of **America's best-selling vehicle** was available only in Texas, catering to the fandom and tastes of football fans in the Dallas-Fort Worth area.

Back in the northeast, the Pittsburgh Steelers are known for having created one of the best promotional products of all time. The "**Terrible Towel**", a simple yellow hand terry cloth towel is and ever-present sight at Steelers games, spun in hand by fans as a part of every rally.

Likewise, *Customer Think* pointed out in a piece written just a year ago that **customers and fans are often one in the same**. Not only have pro teams like the Seattle Seahawks dug in to rally fans and their customers with wearables, **wearable makers like Teespring have gotten in the game**.

Most importantly, it's not just sports teams that benefit by tapping into sports enthusiasm. As ASI points out, **SMBs can greatly boost visibility and the name recognition of their brands** by "getting in the game".

Beside pro sports, high school and local college sports are a great way to spread SMB brands with giveaways like **spirit wear**, classic foam #1 fingers, and **sport bottles**, which consumers save and use regularly.

Whatever you recommend to your customer, from wearables to hard goods, we've got you covered when it comes to the **embroidery digitizing, vector artwork or other graphic design support** you need. Standard turn times are 24 hours and we offer competitive flat rates for services.



"If life were predictable it would cease to be life, and be without flavor."

— Eleanor Roosevelt



"The love of family and the admiration of friends is much more important than wealth and privilege."

— Charles Kuralt



"The one thing that doesn't abide by majority rule is a person's conscience."

— Harper Lee



"Good, better, best. Never let it rest. 'Til your good is better and your better is best."

— St. Jerome



TWEET THAT!

Pens are prominent even in the digital age. Businesses use this [#PromoProduct](https://goo.gl/LHdEMf) as ever-present reminder advertising. <https://goo.gl/LHdEMf>

[Tweet That!](#)

Health & wellness products, cosmetics make for great [#PromoProducts](https://goo.gl/GD7uWq). Easily branded for SMBs. <https://goo.gl/GD7uWq>

[Tweet That!](#)

From dry cleaners to law firms, smaller businesses know the calendar is widely used [#PromoProduct](https://goo.gl/vQjMwU) by consumers. <https://goo.gl/vQjMwU>

[Tweet That!](#)

Tote bags are big at Philadelphia's Reading Terminal Market, which offers them to shoppers <https://goo.gl/sfYlpz>

[Tweet That!](#)

[#TradeShows](http://goo.gl/6z8Toa) are a great way to gather leads and build relationships. [#PromoProducts](http://goo.gl/6z8Toa) help draw a crowd at your display. <http://goo.gl/6z8Toa>

[Tweet That!](#)

The biggest winners of Election 2016 may have been [#PromoProduct](https://goo.gl/JaAiQo) dealers and distributors. <https://goo.gl/JaAiQo>

[Tweet That!](#)

There are 6 reasons your small biz might need to rebrand, says [@Forbes](https://goo.gl/Dmjx2X) magazine. <https://goo.gl/Dmjx2X>

[Tweet That!](#)

Is there a difference between "rebranding" and "brand adaptation"? <https://goo.gl/63Ai1R>

[Tweet That!](#)

Samuel Adams retools its [#logo](https://goo.gl/jGA5qw) for slicker packaging and its Twitter profile aesthetic. <https://goo.gl/jGA5qw>

[Tweet That!](#)

Jack Daniel's, America's most famous whiskey, made its mark on branding and widely influenced logos. <https://goo.gl/4sSELg>

[Tweet That!](#)

Insurer MetLife retired Snoopy and opted for a new blue and green logo, depicting calm, trustworthy advise. <https://goo.gl/GijnXh>

[Tweet That!](#)

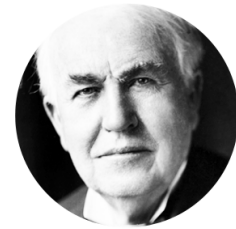
The "Living Logo": What is it and how does it work for a small business? <https://goo.gl/ZKH9p>

[Tweet That!](#)



DESIGN SHOWCASE

Embroidery Digitizing



"I have not failed. I've just found 10,000 ways that won't work."

— Thomas A. Edison

CLIENTS ARE RAVING

"Oh my gosh! This redraw is amazing! And every element is a separate shape. LOVE IT! You guys exceeded my expectations. Thank you so much."

Art manager, Idea Custom Solutions customer

EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT



Kiran Patil

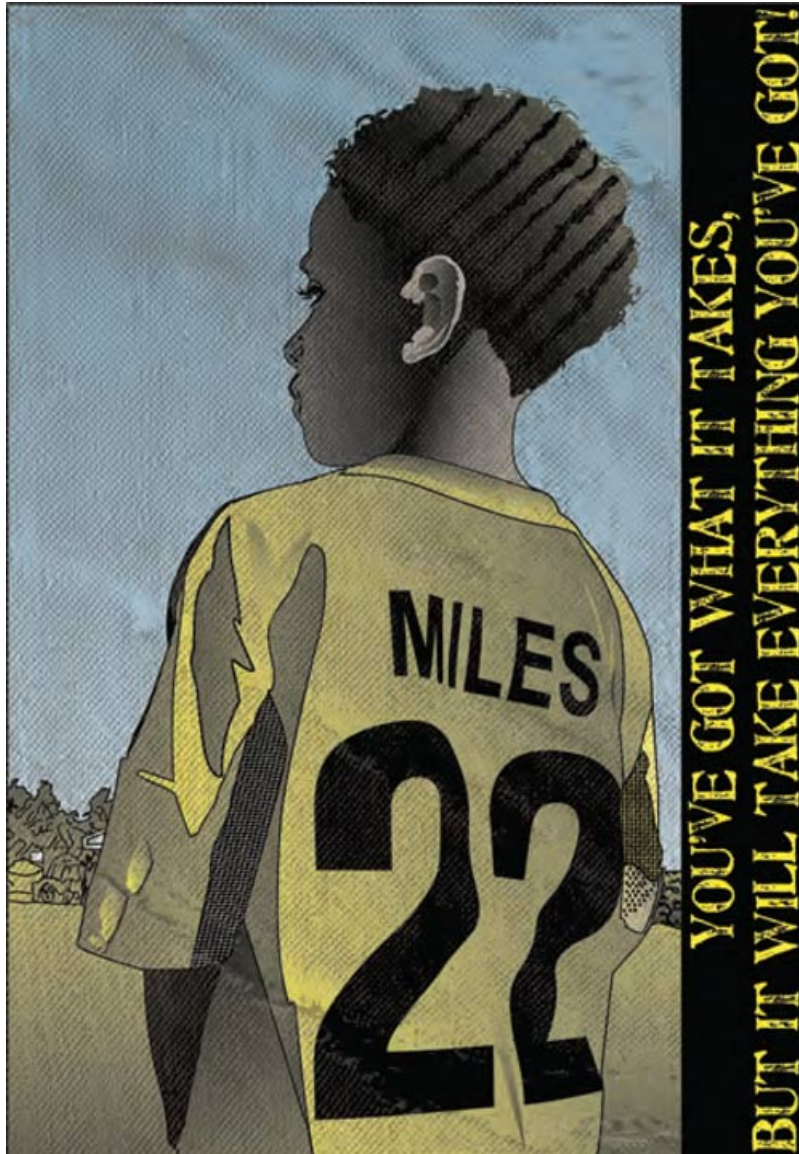
Unit Process Specialist, Artwork

Kiran has been with Idea Custom Solutions Since July of 2008 and was hired as a designer for the artwork team. Today he is a unit process specialist, focused on delivering quality designs within guaranteed turn times.

About the company, he thinks others should know "Idea Custom Solutions is an ocean of knowledge". Kiran says "Work hard and you will always get



Vector Artwork



rewarded for that here".

This good attitude of his is probably why he has been awarded "Star of the Month" five times!

When he is not working, Kiran's hobbies include playing cricket and also donating his energy to social causes. Because he always wants to be in touch with latest technologies and software, he surfs the internet.

He also enjoys being with his wife and daughter, Vedika, on weekends. In fact, he says his daughters' birthday was the most important day of his life.

Looking to the future, someday Kiran hopes to visit Singapore and Malaysia with his family.

If you have any designs created by our team that you would like to share in this newsletter, send them to us at marketing@ideacustom.com



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