

# DESIGN EXPRESS

The graphic services newsletter for promotional products pros



July 2017

## DOES YOUR BRAND HAVE A STYLE GUIDE?



When you think of the National Air and Space Administration, known more famously as NASA, you probably think of names like Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin, the first humans to walk on the moon back in 1969. Perhaps NASA's even bigger footprint conjures up thoughts of America's Space Race depicted by Hollywood in "The Right Stuff" and "Hidden Figures".

Whether you know it or not, NASA's image and brand are part of a very carefully crafted set of ideas. Originally and during the Mercury mission, in which the USA's first nine astronauts were chosen and chartered into space, tech news site *Gizmodo* reports, NASA started with "the meatball", a retro space-age logo styled like a "blue planet filled with twinkling stars, a sleek red craft moving beyond its confines, surrounded by an airfoil that seems to audibly pop," The "meatball" was originally adopted in 1959, again finding favor in the early 1990s.

Also during the early years of NASA, which was also known to astronauts and scientists as the "Agency", NASA kept the American public informed through motion picture news reels and press coverage. But as the program moved on from the 1960s, the idea of the Agency developing its repertoire and brand beckoned, according to the graphics website *Display*:

"After the successes of the Mercury and Apollo programs, NASA now found itself in a slump, impatiently waiting for their Space Shuttle program to kick in. There were no automatic headlines for the Agency now."

So in 1974, two designers leveraged a federal grant from the National Endowment of the Arts set out to create NASA's first letter-based logo,

## QUICK NEWSLETTER SURVEY

Would you recommend this newsletter?

Nope ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☒ 5 For sure

## CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR TEAM

Every month, we celebrate the designers whose work scores the highest impressions on Instagram. This time, **Santosh Waghmare** won for embroidery digitizing and **Suhas Kanholikar** won for vector artwork. Keep up the great work, team!



## NOTABLE QUOTES

with a futuristic new font that would be mimicked in industry, the arts and the media for decades.

Eventually what grew out of the initiative was the [NASA Graphics Standards Manual](#), which detailed the use of the NASA logo on printed documents, workwear, astronaut space suits, vans and transport vehicles and space rockets.

Just like any corporate concern, NASA has rebranded since the 1970s. A renewed interest in NASA's branding popped up in the business press three years ago, when *Wired* lamented that the original word logo, which it dubbed "[the worm logo](#)", was done. Meanwhile *Fast Company's Co.Design* detailed [NASA's way of reusing its retro looks](#) to keep its fonts and brand relevant and beautiful.

What's obvious is that NASA's branding efforts during the Space Race wasn't only about keeping up with the Russians. Clearly, the NASA personnel who were responsible for its design and image were concerned with building credibility with the American public.

The concept of a style guide isn't an idea that should be reserved just for space agencies. Rather, it is a practice that makes perfect sense for both large corporations and small and medium-sized businesses (SMBs) for the simple fact that a style guide sets standards and helps brands grow with consistency. In fact, use of the style guide for big businesses is probably more widespread than you think.

Two years ago design website *Canva* detailed "[50 Meticulous Style Guides Every Startup Should See Before Launching](#)", with examples including guides produced by (and for) large corporations like Google, Cisco and Apple, as well as those used by the Canadian Olympic team, the Calgary Chamber of Commerce, the Irish Red Cross and David Beckham's fledgling Major League Soccer team, the Inter Miami.

*Social Media Today*, an online magazine which acts a resource for both social media tips and branding ideas, published an article last month that laid out very basically what a style guide is and what purpose it serves.

"[A brand style guide is a catalog of the elements in your visual identity](#) as well as a list of dos and don'ts for your business (e.g., how and where to use a logo, tone of voice, etc.)," writes contributor Julie Chomiak. "This document typically includes your logo, fonts, colors and brand voice, and use case examples for each. It's meant to give a quick overview of acceptable ways to present your brand in any medium available."

But *Social Media Today* suggests that if you are putting together [a company brand style guide](#) that it's not the logos, fonts or signage where you should start. Instead, the brand mission should be first and foremost.

"It's only logical to include your mission statement in your brand style guide because it sets the tone for how your brand presents itself, what kind of customer you're trying to reach and your business's underlying ideals," the author wrote.

Once the mission is set in place, a company can more effectively leverage the expertise of designers and marketing specialists to devise a great logo or expand an existing logo into a set of branding standards.

Whatever visual and branding ideas that might be stirring around in your mind — for your own company or for your customers — look to experts



"Building businesses takes tremendous stamina, and success isn't achieved without it."  
— Margaret Heffernan



"Always [be smarter](#) than the people who hire you."  
— Lena Horne



"Tell the [truth](#), [work hard](#), and come to dinner [on time](#)."  
— Gerald R. Ford



"Money coming in says I've made the [right marketing decisions](#)."  
— Adam Osborne



"This world is but [a canvas to our imagination](#)."  
— Henry David Thoreau

such as Idea Custom Solutions for **high-quality, custom logo design** that is fast and cost-effective.

## GREEN AND ECO-FRIENDLY PROMOTIONAL PRODUCTS

Despite their long history and broad usage, **disposable plastic shopping bags are on their way out**. A number of **cities nationwide have banned disposable plastic bags completely**. Meanwhile, other cities like Chicago have created a tax to suppress their use by consumers. According to local news site *DNA Info*, the 7-cent tax instituted at the beginning of the year is already having a major effect, **compelling grocery shoppers to bring their own bags instead of paying the small cost**.

As with most things, changes in regulations — even environmental ones — create marketing opportunities. Grocers both big and small are offering reusable bags, including ones made of recycled materials. As they expand and remodel stores throughout the U.S., **Aldi requires that shoppers bring their bags to checkout**. Meanwhile, Instacart, the comprehensive online grocery shopping and delivery service, packages groceries in **Instacart-branded green and white shopping bags**. While helping their customers to act in an environmentally-conscious way, both Aldi and Instacart are marketing with reusable bags, making them a very effective and eco-friendly promotional product.

Around Earth Day, NBC News detailed some of the various approaches to **promoting sustainability through branded promotional products** and discounts. Some of the ideas were drinkware and portable items that appeal to busy professionals.

Meanwhile, Major League Baseball has begun to favor licensed sportswear and swag made by specialty eco-friendly firms. Last month's MLB Retail Summit in Chicago **showcased wearables made of 100 percent recycled material-based fabrics**. Also featured were **"upcycled" garments by Refried Tees**, that pair a little bit of cutting edge design with discontinued or extra-stock garments to make new wearables.

**"Organic clothing is (a) great environmentally-friendly option for promotional products,"** writes website *Hydrogen Fuel News*. The energy and sustainability blog points out that any reusable items are good choices which go beyond dollars and cents. Because they are used repeatedly and won't end up in landfills, they demonstrate companies' sociopolitical values to customers and prospects.

As such, some SMBs may initially choose not to invest money in promotional products marketing if they think plastic and other non-biodegradable materials are used. Others will be willing to buy "swag with a conscience" from distributors that make green an option.

"T-shirts, sweatshirts, bags and pouches can all be made with organic materials such as hemp and vegetable dyes," *HF News* also points out, while also mentioning that items like reusable coffee mugs aren't just classics, but also can be considered eco-friendly given the longevity of their use.

In recent years as green or sustainable practices have become important to SMBs everywhere, many mark Earth Day as another way to convey their values to customers. **Earth Day doubles as another reason to brand and give out promotional products**, making it as important as other events and holidays during the year, such as Back-to-School, March Madness



**"Work like you don't need the money. Love like you've never been hurt. Dance like nobody's watching."**

— Satchel Paige



**"I hate losing."**

— Serena Williams



**"If you laugh with somebody, then you know you share something."**

— Trevor Noah



**"Believe you can and you're halfway there."**

— Theodore Roosevelt

## EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT



and Independence Day.

That said, **green or earth-friendly promotional products are nothing new**, as the Advertising Specialty Institute (ASI) pointed out a few years ago when it started publishing articles about items including water bottles and bamboo utensils. These and other reusable food and drink items are becoming favorites of businesses that regularly give away logoed promotional products to customers. Even more recently, ASI profiled in *Wearables Magazine* that **organic and natural dyes are becoming more commonplace** among orders for decorated apparel and t-shirts by businesses.

Overall, from special giveaways to loyal customers to **higher-volumes freebies that are ideal for trade shows**, SMBs are always looking ways to keep their marketing fresh and appealing. Meanwhile, many want to consider their carbon footprints.

When talking to new prospects and repeat customers, let them know about eco-friendly options that exist for almost every type of campaign and marketing objective. Turn to **Idea Custom Solutions** for superior graphic services, including the **vector artwork** and **embroidery digitizing** you'll need to imprint, embroider and otherwise decorate those products.

## PORTABLE PROMO PRODUCTS: SMALL BUT EFFECTIVE!

Long before cellular mobile phones became "smart", letting you surf the internet, watch movies, or record every moment of yourself climbing Mount Everest or Machu Picchu, it was a big deal when the cell phone became something you could slip in your pocket.

Portability of virtually everything is desirable in 2017. Often, professionals are so busy and so on-the-go that whatever is light and portable is best and most used.

We have a few ideas for promotional products that ideal for SMBs looking for cost-effective marketing.

### Notebooks and Stationary

We have reported in the past about **the use of technology-related items and their popularity with SMBs**, as well as larger corporations and educational institutions. Products like **earbuds**, phone chargers and even **the latest gadgets** are no-brainer giveaways at trade shows and music fests. They can also double as great brand-building giveaways to new employees.

Yet a great add-on to your SMBs' marketing efforts — whether for a new employee welcome kits, trade shows or **branded giveaways at public events** — comes in the form of an old-fashioned favorite.

The Advertising Specialty Institute (ASI) says that **notebooks and journals are essential tools** even in 2017's digital business climate. *Digiday*, a website that covers the creative and advertising agency space, wrote in February about the ideal employee welcome kit for ad agencies and creative firms. An essential part of the mix is **the branded notebook for new recruits**. Even better is the fact that notebooks are ideal for attendees of conferences or seminars.

Today, the journal notebook is a convenient pocket-sized promo that

### Girish Kulkarni

Unit Process Specialist,  
Vector Artwork

It's been almost 12 years since Girish joined Idea Custom Solutions. He was recently promoted and now does quality checking for artwork orders with the goal of maintaining company quality targets.

One of his proudest accomplishments was when the company gave him the Operational Excellence Award in 2012.

About the company, he thinks people should know, "We are an elite team of people working passionately." He also says, "Idea Custom Solutions is an ocean of opportunities!" With that in mind, his advice to anyone thinking about a career here is, "Keep your mind alert to take on challenges and always think 'I can and I will do.'"

On the weekends or holidays, Girish enjoys spending time with his whole family. He also likes to be in touch with latest technologies and software, so he is always surfing the internet to learn more. Otherwise, Girish likes to read books and watch YouTube videos.

Someday, he would like to visit all the famous fountains and waterfalls around the world. He would ultimately like to be known as a good mentor who can enhance the skills of other team members.

## TWEET THAT!

What color is your **#brand**? What colors are trending for **#PromoProducts**? You might be surprised!  
<https://goo.gl/hHiXe9>

[Tweet That!](#)

Geography plays a role in **#branding #SMBs**? **@MarketingProfs' #infographic** breaks it down.  
<https://goo.gl/q9AxMD>

[Tweet That!](#)

Think Internet companies have it made? They face constant need to stay on

[Tweet That!](#)



comes in a variety of colors, as well as different finishes that can include leather covers, snaps and useful pockets galore. Some also come with phone charging slots and other features.

Don't forget that notebooks and journals couple well with [another beloved bellwether promotional product category: writing utensils](#).

## USB Drives

Ever since the portable USB replaced the lomega Zip Drive (or being chained to a desktop computer), it has been hailed as a necessary tool, as well as "boring tech" and [a literal life-saver](#). Five years ago, *Fast Company* even went so far as to suggest that [the USB memory stick was on its way to extinction](#) (it seems they were wrong).

Regardless of what you think of them — dull, fashionable, or otherwise—USB drives are not only here to stay, they are used by everyone. ASI reports that [60 percent of consumers from age 18-24 own and regularly use at least one branded USB drive](#). Plus, nearly half of survey respondents age 35-44 also own and use one, which demonstrates that USBs are not just a knickknack for younger generations.

For SMBs interested in adding these useful items to their list of branded giveaways, there are quite a few options. So far in 2017, USB drives in bright colors and designs that appeal to fans of [Star Wars](#), [Legos](#), [Minecraft](#) and [Game of Thrones](#) have emerged, among others. On the more conservative side of the spectrum, [SMBs can order options like swivel flash drives](#), credit card-shaped USBs and USB drives that double as pens.

## Fidget Spinners and Toys

By now you've heard about [fidget spinners, said to be both a revolution in simple play](#) as well as a passing fad. But if you think they are just for kids, think again. ASI says that [fidget spinners have soared in popularity](#).

One excited promo products distributor named Scott Pearson put it this way: ["The fidget craze is happening everywhere](#). Although the original design has been around for years, these spinners are now flying off the shelves at 7-11s and will saturate the promotional market over the next six months."

This month ASI also profiled a gubernatorial candidate who has jumped on the fidget spinner trend. Tennessee Republican Randy Boyd is using "Randy Boyd for Governor" [fidget spinners as a part of his campaign swag](#) as a bid to raise some campaign cash and spread the word of his candidacy.

In the sports world, [the initial run of Major League Baseball fidget spinners has reportedly sold out](#) already, while both baseball and the National Football League have started preparing for the fall with [another set of the popular pocket-sized toy](#).

No matter what fits best into pockets of your customers' target audiences, make sure to [get the support of an experienced graphics partner](#). At Idea Custom Solutions, we're here to help!

top of [#branding](#).  
<https://goo.gl/oJbyDn>

Borden Cheese  
[#redesign](#) = past + present: classic [#logo](#) with eye-catching color, sleek packaging.  
<https://goo.gl/eDuFcD>

[Tweet That!](#)

Swank hotel and resort The Diplomat opts for a brand new [#logo](#), crisp new font, brighter color.  
<https://goo.gl/3paESN>

[Tweet That!](#)

Across the world, [@Michelin](#) Man is here to stay. Classic [#brand](#) imagery renewed by tire firm.  
<https://goo.gl/e2as92>

[Tweet That!](#)

U.S. Ski and Snowboard Association and its Olympic teams unveil [#rebrand](#) with new crest [#logo](#).  
<https://goo.gl/HgLF3>

[Tweet That!](#)

You can put a [@MLB](#) baseball [#logo](#) anywhere. But on diapers?  
<https://goo.gl/yhRS9e>

[Tweet That!](#)

[#MarketingCollateral](#), [#brochures](#) and one-sheets come from digital [#marketing](#) raw materials.  
<https://goo.gl/yhMyG5>

[Tweet That!](#)

Bartender swag(ger): retro coasters, [#branded](#) items add ambiance to Brooklyn liquor bar.  
<https://goo.gl/pAeUGy>

[Tweet That!](#)

Font fancy: [@ASICentral](#) has tips for choosing the right font for your embroidery.  
[#PromoProducts](#)  
<https://goo.gl/TBvx3z>

[Tweet That!](#)

## CLIENTS ARE RAVING

"The art looks fantastic. This will work great for our orders."

**Creative department supervisor, Idea Custom Solutions supplier client**

"Thanks to you and your team for expediting yesterday's orders. We should have a



## DESIGN SHOWCASE

### Embroidery Digitizing



### Vector Artwork



similar number today, possibly 10-15 additional. ”

**Graphics supervisor, supplier client**

“ Just wanted to say from store [number] that we are ALWAYS SO GRATEFUL, appreciative and impressed with the design service that we receive from all of you! If you ever need us to update our processes or modify how we send files/information, please feel free to reach out and let us know. ”

**Customer support manager for major retail client**

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](mailto:marketing@ideacustom.com)



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