

Designing a Business Identity

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Table of Contents

Part I: Design Identity	Page 1
Introduction	Page 1
Why a Business Identity is Important	Page 1
What Makes an Identity Successful	Pages 1 - 3
How Customers Think	Pages 3-4
How to Design a Business Identity	Pages 4-5
Conclusion	Page 5
 Part II: An Example	 Page 6
Introduction	Page 6
Answers to Questions from Part I: How to Design a Business Identity	Page 6
A Visual Audit of Similar Venues	Pages 6 - 8
Sianzola	Page 9
A Look at the Pieces Designed for Sianzola	Page 10
Business Card	Page 10
Brochure	Page 11
Letterhead and Envelope	Page 12
Miscellaneous	Page 13
Identity Manual	Page 14
Conclusion	Page 15
Appendix I: A Guide to Color	Pages 16 - 17
 Bibliography	 Page 18

Part I: Business Identity

Everyday people make decisions that send them in one direction or another based on visual cues that drive those choices. These visual cues become a large part of one's life whether aware of them or not. Because of this, graphic designers have an enormous part in the success of a business or product. Poorly designed identities can easily turn away customers even if the business or product is worth-while. More than just a keen eye for good design is necessary when designing an identity for a new business (or re-working an existing identity). Having a successful identity is a key factor to the success of a business.

New business owners don't always pay attention to the identity of their business either because they are not aware of the importance of a cohesive identity or they cannot afford to hire someone experienced to design the identity. This is a sad reality that is obvious no matter where one turns. A person does not have to be a designer in order to know what is appealing and what is not, and if a business identity is not appealing no one is going to make an attempt to check out the business.

Why a Business Identity is Important

On an average day, consumers are exposed to about 6,000 ads and within one year, over 25,000 new products (Wheeler 6). Having a successful identity will allow a business to stand out over the rest and be noticed, be remembered. Failing to do so could cause the business and its product to get lost in the crowd. In this day and age a business needs to stand out. Having a business identity is important because consumers have changed with the times. Consumers determine their purchases by comparing symbolic attributes such as looks, where the product is sold, who buys it and what others say about it (Neumeier 8).

What Makes an Identity Successful

"The most successful identities speak with one voice; the message is clear and the design is not confusing" (Cullen 47). Consumers look, unknowingly, for many characteristics when searching for a business to begin building a "relationship" with. When searching, an identity that is distinctive will certainly catch a consumer's eye. An identity that is distinctive will cause the business to stand out from competitors in the same line of business. In order to achieve distinction, an identity should be bold and innovative as well as clearly portraying the business's message. Identities should also be memorable, allowing the consumer to recall the

business in the future.

“An identity should visually speak the language of the company to the audience” Allen Boe (Cullen 82). All individuals involved with a business should be aware of the message and feel to be portrayed. If all are on the same page, the identity will seem cohesive and sturdy, creating a trustworthy business in the view of the consumers.

Each business owner should be aware that a good identity does not necessarily guarantee success. Once an identity has been created the business needs to have a desire to follow through and nurture the identity. The identity system needs to be enforced, tweaked, monitored and occasionally revitalized in order to keep up with the times and continue to attract customers (Wheeler 32). The creation of a business identity means the beginning of an investment of time by everyone involved in the business in order to help the identity become successful.

The identity should also create and portray depth. People connect to ideas in different ways and each style needs to be taken into consideration when designing an identity. An identity needs the ability to communicate with audiences on different levels. Skilled communicators make connections within an identity in order to speak to those who prefer information, style, or emotion. (Neuemeier 126-127).

Today consumers are more aware of their senses and tend to want an experience that will entice more than just one. Consumers are looking for a complete experience and in order to accomplish this, identities should involve as many senses as possible. In the words of Benjamin Franklin, “Tell me and I’ll forget, show me and I might remember, involve me and I’ll understand”. Consumers want to understand what the business is about, what the business stands for to see if they have the same beliefs. Once a business gets the consumer to understand, the consumer’s trust will be gained which in turn will cause the consumer to return and spread the word.

Each of the five senses has a different level of importance to consumers as to how something should be experienced. The most important sense in an experience is sight (58%) with smell (45%) following as the second most important sense. Sound (41%) is third followed by taste (31%) and lastly, touch (25%). (Lindstrom 69) The more senses a business can involve in their overall identity the greater the customer experience and the higher the chance of customers will return.

“Sight is the most seductive sense of all” (Lindstrom 18). This fact contributes to why most businesses focus all energies on making sure the design is great without realizing that the other senses are being ignored,

even though they have the potential to bring the identity to new heights. Customers are first drawn to a business through sight. If the design is attractive the customer is interested. But for many businesses, this is where the experience ends (depending on the service).

Many businesses do not pay attention to the second most important sense: smell. The sense of smell is very strong in that it can evoke memories within the consumer. Whereas this is not a difficult sense to appease when dealing with a food-related business, other businesses have trouble tapping into scent. Just like new cars have that “new car” smell (which is actually a man-made scent), businesses should find a unique way to evoke the second most important sense.

Sound, the third sense, is not as difficult as smell in finding a solution. Sound is connected to mood and should be carefully considered. A business should think about the mood they want to bring upon each customer. A change in sound as the day progresses would work in a chic restaurant setting, playing up-beat music during the day then slowing the music down as evening rolls around. Most businesses only pay attention to sight and sound (Lindstrom 22).

The fourth sense is taste, which is probably the weakest of all senses. Taste and smell are closely related in that they affect one another greatly. With the exception of the food industry, taste is very tricky to incorporate into an identity system. After all, what would be offered for tasting at a car dealership?

Finally, the fifth sense is that of touch. Touch is a most important tool for those who are blind, needing this sense in order to survive. A business should consider the possibility of including texture in the identity. For example, the texture of an outdoor shop should be organic or even a little rough but a baby store should have soft textures.

How Customers Think

According to Wheeler, the sequence of cognition is as follows: Shapes are recognized first due to the fast imprint on memory, second is color which triggers emotion and should be chosen carefully, and finally is content which takes the most time to process. This is where being different from competitors will come in handy. The human brain filters out irrelevant information. Data from previous experiences is compared to data currently being experienced and then this data is combined. Most decisions are based on what one sees. What makes this business different from the one down the street? The brain finds contrast, in design and concept, aesthetically pleasing. (Neumeier 34-35).

When a consumer comes across a business or product that intrigues them, a sequence of thoughts

quickly flicker through their mind. After initially noticing the business or product, the consumer asks, “What is it?” followed by, “Why should I care?” The consumers want to know why one product should be purchased or one business visited over another. The consumer then desires more information to support the previous statement. Finally, the consumer is ready to look for information, such as features or price, to help make a final decision. (Neumeier 91-94).

When looking for information, Neumeier states that there are two types of people. One type of person relies on “hard” information, such as facts, in order to make a purchase and the other type of person relies on “soft” information, such as feelings, to make a purchase. From there Neumeier goes on to say that the world is also divided into four mindsets with two being right brain dominant and two left brain dominant. Those in the left brain dominant group are those who rely on “hard” information and are identified as either appliers or preservers. Those in the right brain dominant group rely on “soft” information and are creators and discoverers. Being able to appeal to all mindsets is very advantageous to a business and will likely move the business up in popularity.

How to Design a Business Identity

Before coming to any kind of design ideas, those involved with the business in need of an identity should brainstorm and come up with great answers to a few very simple questions. One of the most important questions that should be asked is, “Who are we and what do we do?” Those involved in the creation of the business need to determine specifically the type of business it is and what products or services will be provided. “An identity should embody the attitude of the product, service or company and convey a message of who or what they are. This goes for font choices as well as mark design and other graphics. A font and look should be designed because it is a good fit, not just because it is a trend” Jon Wippich (Cullen 17). Being aware of the answer to this question will allow everyone involved to be on the same page in order to answer the next question.

“What kind of message should the identity portray?” Clearly define what the identity should accomplish and then write one sentence that describes what the identity needs to communicate (Cullen 61). Understanding the vision, values and goals of a business is very important when deciding the type of message a business wants to put out on the market. Putting the wrong message out will confuse customers and potentially drive them away from the business at hand.

The next question to be asked is, “Who is our target market?” Coming to a conclusion on the type of

people the business is looking to attract is very important. If the audience is too broad, the right people may not show; too narrow and customers may be difficult to come by. Determining the target audience will aid in future decisions such as color or font choices and the atmosphere that needs to be set.

The next step is very important: conduct research! A vast amount of money is not necessary for this step. There is no problem if a new business cannot afford to hire professionals to do the research. Most new businesses do not have that kind of money to begin with. The quickest and easiest way to do research is to pay attention to the competition. Look at identity systems of other businesses in the same industry and notice what they are doing right (or wrong). Look at the trends and differences that make them stand out. "What are they doing and how can you do it better?" (Cullen 69).

Now that these questions have been asked and thoroughly discussed, ideas for design can be put out on the table. Ideas can come from anywhere if one keeps an open mind. Listen to what people are saying and do not be afraid to speak up, there are no bad ideas at this stage. During this process, keep in mind the answers to the previous questions as well as how to touch senses other than just sight. As stated previously, consumers today are more apt to be drawn to and remember a business that involves more than just one sense.

Part II: An Example

To help understand the previously described process, an example follows using a potential future business as a starting point. The concept for this business is a unique one in that the business will only serve hot chocolate, but hot chocolate with a twist. White, milk and dark chocolates will be the choices for the chocolate base in which customers can choose from a number of typical to unique “add-ins”. Sianzola is intended to be located in New York City, specifically in the Soho area. Sianzola will also feature artwork by local artists which will provide a pleasurable viewing experience.

Answers to Questions from Part I: How to Design a Business Identity

In response to the first question asked above, “Who are we and what do we do?”: Virtually everyone likes chocolate to some degree and Sianzola intends on giving consumers an experience with chocolate that can be tailored to their own needs. Those with a general liking for chocolate can choose flavors that would not be considered too adventurous such as caramel or peppermint. As for those who absolutely love chocolate and are feeling very adventurous, more daring flavors such as curry or saffron are available.

The second question, “What kind of message do we want to portray?” offers the following response: The message Sianzola would like to portray is one of uniqueness and openness. Each customer’s personal experience is of the utmost importance to Sianzola. Customers will come to Sianzola in order to experience chocolate in a way they have not yet experienced. Sianzola wants customers to enjoy their time being in a place where they can enjoy unique chocolate drinks, prompt service, interesting music, amazing art, and good company. The atmosphere of Sianzola is up-beat and exciting, hip and welcoming.

“Who is our target market?”, the third question, poses this answer: Sianzola’s target audience includes those within the ages of 18 thru 40, focusing on college students to the working middle-aged person. Sianzola is also meant for a more creative group because Sianzola doubles as an art gallery featuring artwork from local artists. This chocolate café will be attractive to both genders.

A Visual Audit of Similar Venues

In order to get an idea of any trends that might occur within similar venues, a visual audit was taken in New York City including photographs and physical items from four locations. Also, one venue was visited in the mid-west in order to monitor any trends that happen due to it being a similar venue or if there are noticeable

differences due to the change in region. The four New York City venues audited include: Godiva, La Maison du Chocolat, Max Brenner, and Vosges. The venue from the mid-west is Cantabria located in Bemidji, Minnesota.

Godiva is a very well-known chocolatier company that is very successful in most parts of the world. Products from Godiva are higher in price and Godiva tends to appeal more to a crowd willing to pay these prices. Though, Godiva is not so outrageously priced that an average person would feel scared to make a purchase. This is apparent in Godiva's color choices. The main colors that Godiva utilizes are gold and brown, two very typical colors in the chocolate industry. The gold represents a certain richness that is contained in the quality of the product and the look of each Godiva location. The shade of brown used is definitely a rich brown and conveys again the message of richness in the chocolate as well as being a trend that occurs among most chocolate related venues. As seasons change and occasions occur, Godiva changes the colors that accompany the gold and brown in the stores, packaging, and advertisements. The colors change to fit each season but each color chosen tends to keep a rich tone. The overall feel of Godiva is simple and elegant, nothing is overdone.

The second visual audit in New York City was done at La Maison du Chocolat. This venue is considered the Versace of all chocolate within the city, as is very obvious just by standing outside the shop. La Maison du Chocolat uses the same colors as Godiva, gold and brown, but portrays them in a very different manner. Where Godiva seems more open and welcoming, La Maison du Chocolat seems set aside purely for the elite, which also comes across in their pricing (\$8.00 for a small cup of hot chocolate). Upon entering, the customer gets almost a complete sensory experience which includes sight, taste, sound and smell; a wonderful experience if one is willing to work up the nerve to walk in without feeling like a trespasser into the world of the elite. La Maison du Chocolat definitely has a very specific group of people being targeted.

Max Brenner is the third NYC shop to be visually audited and is a very exciting experience for consumers. Upon entering the building one can tell that this venue appeals to the masses. Max Brenner brings together a community of chocolate lovers in a setting that is very hip and up-beat, even comical as seen in the tagline, "Chocolate by the Bald Man" along side a simple line drawing of the bald man himself. Once again, brown is used and is the primary color of this venue. Brown is then complimented by the use of many bright colors such as orange, yellow, pink, green and blue. Max Brenner also indulges consumers in a complete sensory experience. Upon entrance, the smell of chocolate enters the nose and all sorts of colors and contraptions intrigue the eye. A person could run their fingers through a small vat of cocoa beans while listening to the up-beat music playing throughout the room. The chocolate can be ordered to go or else one can be seated and

can experience the fun variety of mugs. By looking around the room and seeing the products, the objective of attracting all sorts of people is quite clear.

Vosges is the final New York City venue to be looked at for a visual audit. Vosges presents a very different feel in the way the overall design is portrayed. The tagline for Vosges is “Haut Chocolat” which is portrayed in the color usage, the design of the space and in print materials. Vosges takes a step away from the other venues and does not use brown as a primary color. Purple is the primary color contrasted with very clean white and silver accents. The only other colors seen are in the packaging of the chocolate and these colors are very vibrant to compliment the contrast between the purple and white. Although Vosges gives an air of being upscale, this venue also seems very inviting. Upon walking into the space, one almost gets the sense of being in a modern and chic palace. The overall look is very simple and elegant.

Cantabria, located in northern Minnesota, is a very typical small town coffee house. The atmosphere is very welcoming and gives a sense of warmth and coziness. This venue is more of a coffee house, serving all sorts of drinks and food instead of focusing more on just a chocolate aspect, but is probably the most similar style of venue to Sianzola as possible. Cantabria has a very eclectic feel with the entrance designated as the purchasing area, the next room decorated in a southwestern style, and the third room dimly-lit with vines and other plants as if one were visiting an ancient ruin. Cantabria does not seem to have set any group of colors to be the primary color scheme. The sign outside as well as the brochure use yellow, blue and green but this is about the only place these colors are seen. The design seems inconsistent and even though the place is popular, especially among college students, it does not have very appealing design.

When comparing each of these five venues one can see that there are many similarities and differences that are worth paying attention to. All five locales use brown as a color whether in a dominant manner or in a more subdued way. Each of the four New York venues has something that seems to keep in trend with other venues of a similar kind and each has some feature that makes them unique from the others. All four have some level of modernity and “hip-ness” to the design and atmosphere. Cantabria, in Minnesota, follows the same trend of using brown as a color somewhere but then follows no other trend with comparison to the New York City venues.

Sianzola

Sianzola should be able to have a successful market in New York City when compared to the other venues. Sianzola uses a rich shade of brown in order to stick with a trend that is obviously working for other venues, and generally just makes sense for a business of this kind. A trendy color palate has been chosen for Sianzola that is not really seen anywhere else in the industry and should prove to be one of the aspects of making Sianzola unique. Sianzola will also follow the trend of keeping the design of the establishment sleek and modern due to the fact that there does not seem to be a trend in New York City for styles similar to that of Cantabria.

Sianzola also intends on involving as many senses as possible for a consumer's experience. Sight and smell will be easily accomplished just by the design and the specific type of business Sianzola is. The smell of chocolate will constantly be permeating throughout Sianzola. Not only will the identity of Sianzola be appealing to sight but the fact that artwork will be surrounding the customers as they drink their chocolate and chat will also enhance the visual experience. The sense of taste is another obvious sense easily covered by the type of business. Customers will enjoy the taste of chocolate during their time at Sianzola and should enjoy their drinks even more knowing they have options. For an audio experience, Sianzola will play music over a sound system that will slow down as the day progresses. The style of music will fit the style of the business and be modern and simple. Music along the lines of "Flying High" by Buddah Bar will be considered. The sense of touch will be accomplished by having the seating upholstered in a satin fabric, representing the smoothness of the chocolate.

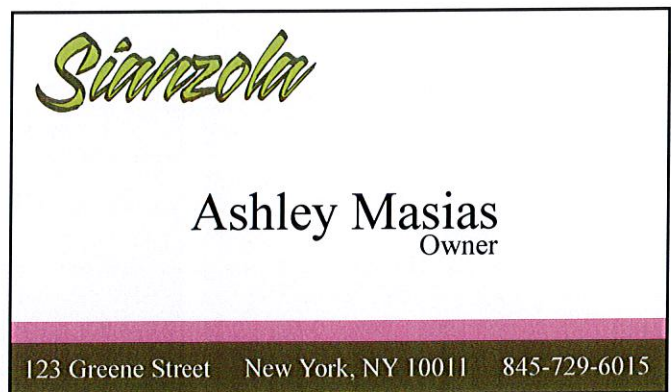
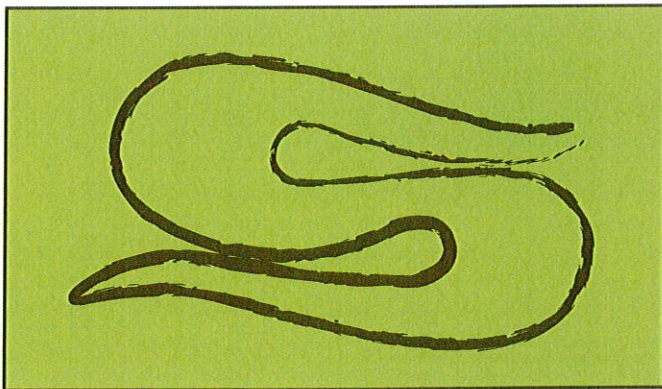
Note: For brief explanations of the colors mentioned in each venue description, refer to Appendix I.

A Look at the Pieces Designed for Sianzola

Business Card

A business card is important to have because it is a mini-advertisement for a business and a means in which consumers (or partners) remember a business or person within that business. Sometimes a business card can be the first look a person gets into a business. A designer should make sure the business card is easy to understand and contains a minimal amount of information. The business card should also be easy to produce since they are needed quite frequently. (Wheeler 131) Play around with various shapes and sizes of the business card, though keeping in mind that something too different may get tossed out.

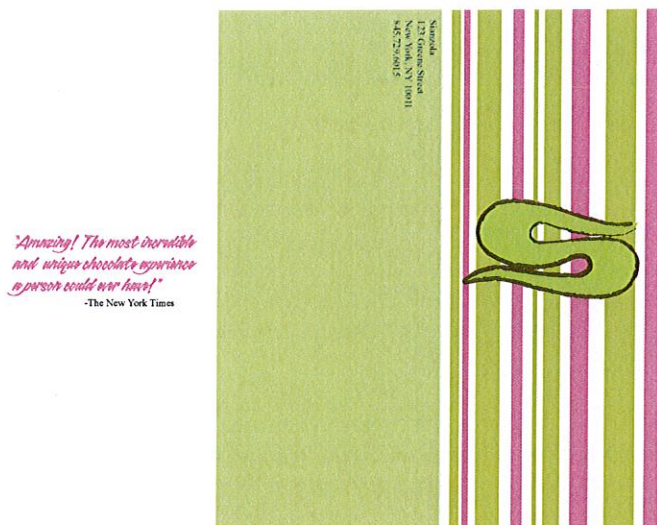
Looking at the business card designed for Sianzola, one can see simplicity of the design. Only the basic information needed is displayed on the card as to not over-power the card with unnecessary information. Not only is the design simple but the business card also stays consistent with the overall desired look for the identity. The front of the business card has the primary symbol, the card holder's name and title, and the contact information for the business. Stripes are used, as will be seen in other pieces, to stay consistent with the identity. The back of the card has the secondary logo in front of the primary green color of the business.



Brochure

A brochure is a popular marketing tool and an easy way to make information available; something all businesses utilize. A brochure serves as an extension of an identity because they package most every aspect of a business into one small printed piece. Brochures need to also be easy to understand and should be well written so as not to cause any confusion. (Wheeler 133) A brochure should include any information the business wants a person to know. Be careful not to overload a brochure with information, but have enough so one gets a good idea of the business.

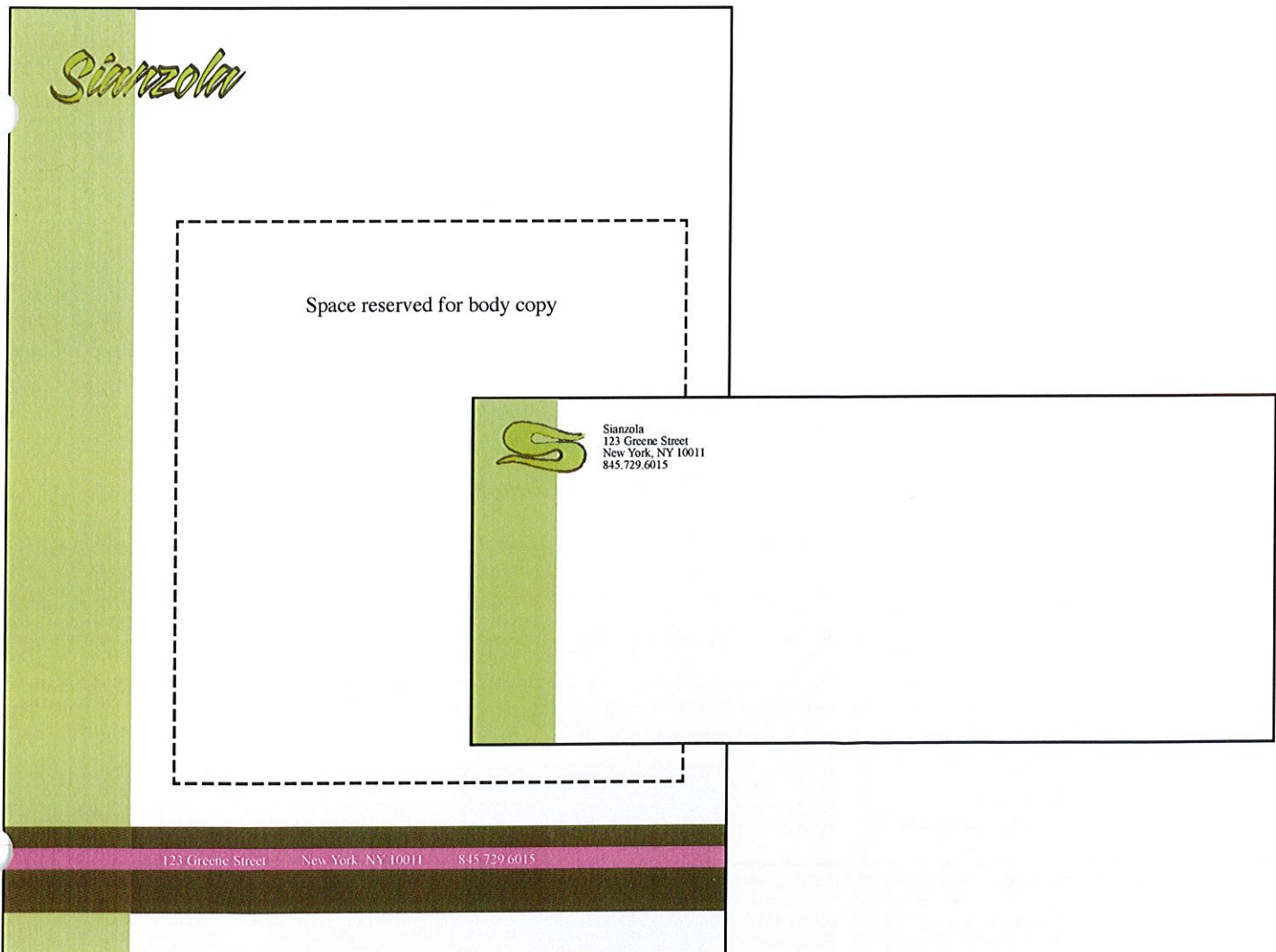
The front panel of Sianzola's brochure is very simple having only the secondary logo on top of the stripes that are seen throughout the design. Opening the brochure, immediately one sees a very simple panel with only a quotation from the New York Times. Immediately to the left, the open panel has Sianzola's mission and describes the experience the customer will have. Both of these panels compliment one another by reinforcing the unique experience of Sianzola. Finish opening the brochure and the center panel discusses the quality of ingredients Sianzola uses with a copy of the menu on the right-hand panel. When folded, the back of the brochure serves as a blank area to insert an address and a stamp to send the brochure in the mail.



Letterhead and Envelope

A letterhead is used to extend the identity of a business through mail to a person who (typically) has some sort of vested interest in the business. Not only will the business be identified by the person for whom the letter was intended, but also anyone who comes in contact with and views the envelope. A letterhead and envelope are a very cohesive way to extend the identity of a business. A designer should be aware of the folds, of the right paper to use, and make sure the letterhead is faxable (Wheeler 129).

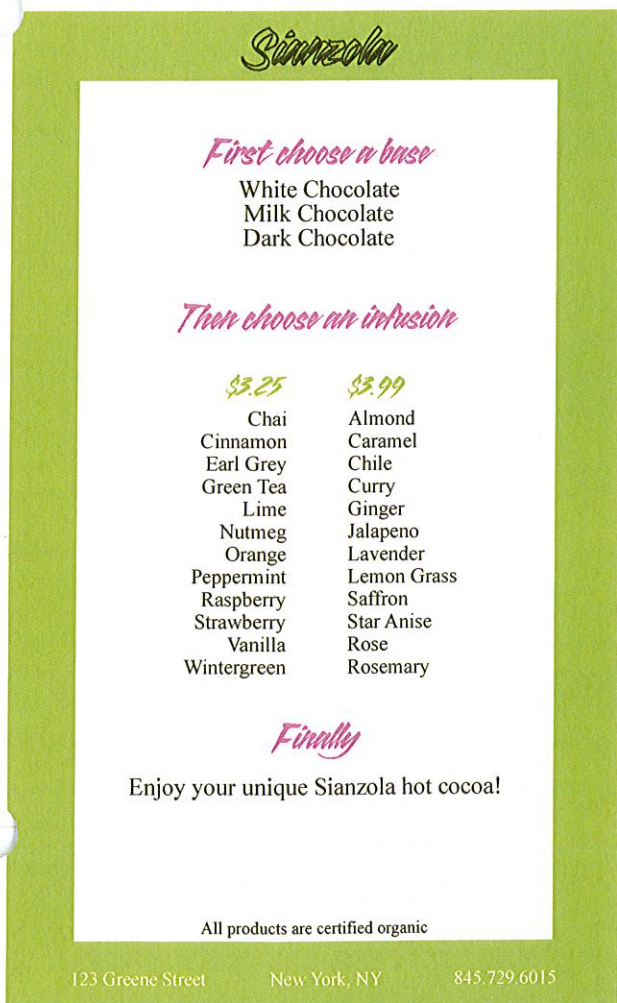
Both the letterhead and envelope designed for Sianzola remain consistent with the other designed pieces for the business. The letterhead is very clean-cut and simple, using stripes of Sianzola's colors to build a border for the page and to direct where the body of text should be placed. The envelope is simple not only for the sake of being clean but also to remain from interfering with any necessary postal marks.



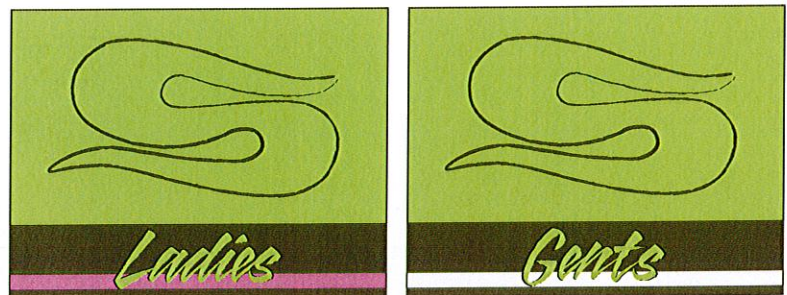
Miscellaneous

Depending on the business, certain other items may be designed and should remain consistent with other designs throughout the business. As Sianzola is in the food industry, items such as napkins, menus, and restroom signs have also been designed. Sianzola's napkins appear in either of the two primary colors, pink or green, and are simple in design with only the secondary logo in the lower right corner. The rectangular shape of the napkins is an intentional choice by the designer in order to achieve a stripe-like shape. The menu also appears in a rectangular fashion and is laid out in a modern design. All the information needed appears on the menu in a simple manner so as not to be confusing to customers. Finally the signs for the restrooms are labeled, "Gents" and "Ladies" to be somewhat unique. Each of the signs are dominantly green and brown to keep consistent. Other than the name on the sign, in order to denote the difference between the Gents and the Ladies, there is a white stripe on the Gents' sign and a pink stripe on the Ladies' sign.

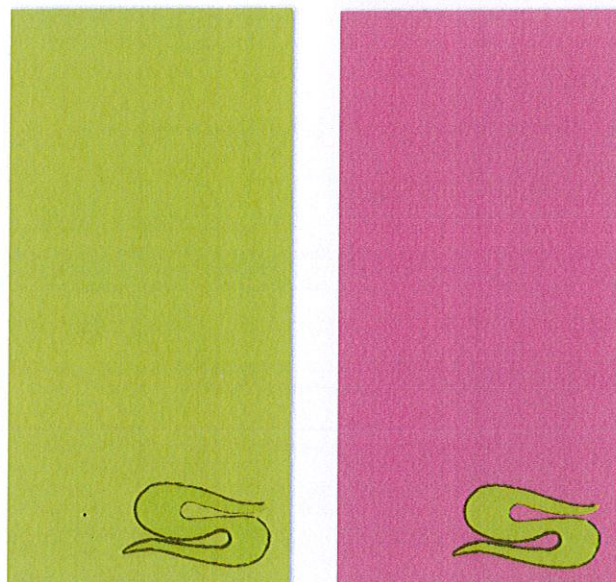
Menu



Restroom Signage



Napkins

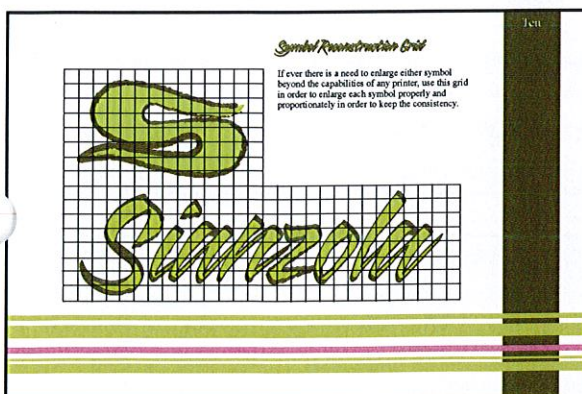
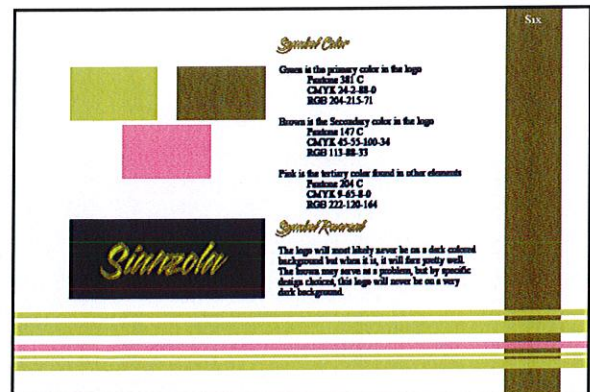
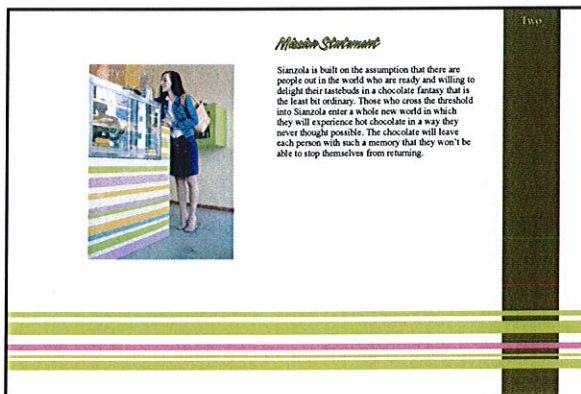


Identity Manual

An identity manual is a booklet that is created to ensure the identity design of a business remains intact. This is accomplished by including in the identity manual everything that is needed in order to keep the design consistent. Identity manuals instruct verbally as well as visually on how to correctly use the logo, any secondary elements and any font or color choices relating to the business. These manuals are meant to instruct any designer on the restrictions of placing other elements near or behind the logo and how the logo should be arranged among other elements. Identity manuals should also give precise instructions on how to reconstruct the logo or any other elements of an identity.

The overall style of the Sianzola Identity Manual remains consistent with the identity of the business by using the same colors and stripes throughout the page design. The manual stays within the overall feeling of the business by creating a modern layout to present the regulations.

A Sampling of Manual Pages



The importance of creating an inviting dining experience will not be overlooked at Sianzola. Design will play a vital part in capturing a competitive market share in the middle to high end chocolate shops. The example given by Part II has been provided in order to help better understand what is involved in the process of designing a business identity. After seeing Part I applied to an actual situation in Part II by using Sianzola, a potential future venue, one should be able to apply this information to any future business identity being created. Keeping in mind that a successful identity remains a defining factor in the success of a business, one must in turn focus his or her design to attract the target market. This can only be accomplished by taking into account all of the senses involved in appreciating chocolate whilst feeling stimulated and attracted to the space where the confections are served.

Appendix I: A Guide to Color

A short explanation of each color used in the various venues discussed according to Eiseman.

Pink

Pink can have many different personalities depending on the value or intensity. The pinks used in the discussed venues are similar in that they are a bit deeper and more intense than a bubblegum pink. These pinks tend to catch attention and present an up-scale and sophisticated look. Pink is also perceived as sweet-tasting and sweet-smelling, which is very useful in the chocolate business.

Orange

Orange is seen as playful and child-like, containing some of the drama of red combined with the cheerful good humor of yellow. Orange is very appealing to the young or young-at-heart as it can give a giddy, comic and cartoon-like impression as very obviously seen in Max Brenner.

Yellow

Yellow emulates sunshine and is a color identified with imagination and enlightenment. The bright yellow seen in Max Brenner is cheerful and energetic in nature. This yellow also serves as a great attention-getter.

Brown

Brown is the ultimate earth color associated with hearth and home, substance and stability. Brown has earned greater respect due to the rise of designer coffees (in this instance, chocolate). Whether wholesomely unprocessed or decadently delicious, brown is well connected to good tastes.

Blue

“The ocean has never disappeared and the sky has never fallen. Because of this association, blue is seen as reliable, trustworthy, dependable and committed.” Blue also has a very calming effect, being very serene and sedate.

Green

Of all the colors in the spectrum, green offers the widest array of choices. The green seen in Sianzola (and packaging of Vosges) is a brighter shade of green and is associated with the first buds of spring and renewal. The brightness of this green is great for catching attention and will easily catch a wondering eye.

Purple

Purple is a glorious yet complex color, preferred by very creative and eccentric types, as seen in Vosges. Purple is both sensual and spiritual; it blends the excitement and sexuality of red with the tranquility of blue. The presence of red within the hue serves as an attention-getter while the blue keeps purple more controlled than red.

White

White is not technically a color, rather in terms of pigments and dyes white is the absence of color or when speaking in terms of light, it is the presence of all color. Seen very prominently in Vosges, white imparts a sense of purity and simplicity. White works really well for contrast which is easily understood when viewing photographs of Vosges. White is viewed as a “clean slate” against which all colors can be contrasted.

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<http://www.maxbrenner.com>

<http://www.vosgeschocolate.com>

Godiva -- Times Warner Center, New York City

La Maison Du Chocolat -- Rockefeller Center, New York City

Max Brenner -- Union Square, New York City

Vosges -- Soho, New York City

Cantabria -- Bemidji, Minnesota