



FIVE PRINCIPLES FOR A

COMPELLING B2B VISUAL BRAND

A powerful visual brand may be sufficient to add, a soft drink – but B2B purchases are typically based on concrete criteria, which the message conveys.

Not to say the visual brand is secondary. Rather, it serves as the visual articulation of a company's message. And, when well-executed, it can evoke emotion, portray experiences, and communicate benefits. The two go hand in hand.

Arketi's branding process was honed across more than 200 engagements with B2B tech companies. And we've refined our methodology over two decades to distill these five principles for building a knock-their-socks-off brand.

THE LOGO SETS THE TONE

Say the word “brand,” and most think “logo.” It’s understandable – beyond a spelled-out name, logos are typically a buyer’s first impression of your brand identity.

That is to say: a logo shouldn’t fall out of a vacuum. Marketers must factor in critical decisions around color palettes, fonts, typography, shapes and forms, imagery, and other visual elements into the development process.

CONSIDER...

If it isn’t broken, don’t fix it! A logo update isn’t always necessary, and oftentimes, a new brand can be built around an existing logo to preserve continuity.

Name game If you’re considering a new name for your brand, do that first. Your logo design is not the place to start that conversation.

Streamline, simplify, strengthen Review your logo with a critical eye. Even if a total do-over isn’t in the cards, if your logo uses more than two colors, includes dated elements like drop shadows and swooshes, or can’t scale in size, it’s time to pare it back.

CASE IN POINT:

It’s always helpful to see a logo in context. Take a look at some of these before-and-after logos we helped B2B technology companies develop and launch.

ORIGINAL



REDESIGN



USE COLOR TO CONJURE EMOTION

Setting aside personal preference, we all know color can create a mood. Choosing a palette for your brand means striking a balance between what's expected, which helps instantly place the brand in context (say, green for an environmental play), and what's not, which can help differentiate (like picking pink for a construction product).

But there are also practical considerations to keep in mind.

SUCH AS...

You don't need a rainbow - We're often asked, "How many colors should be in the palette?" Six to 10 is about right: enough to provide variety for most applications, without becoming a free-for-all. Lead with two or three.



Consider contrast - It's best if your color palette "works" with black or white text on top. And remember to ensure sufficient contrast between each to help those with color blindness.

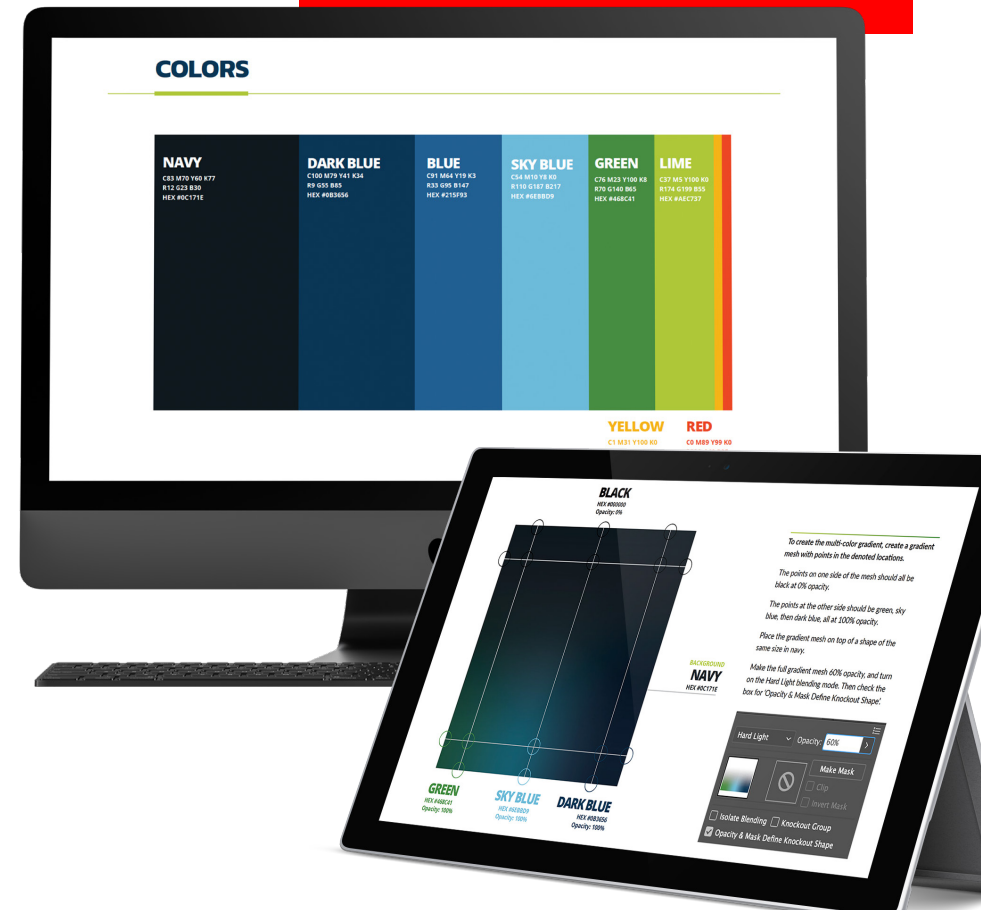


Expand with tints and shades - Adding white (technically known as a "tint") or black (a "shade") can expand the range of your palette while keeping things harmonious. But avoid a free-for-all. Stick to two or three tints and shades for each color. It's all about "managed variety."



CASE IN POINT:

DefenseStorm's color palette features two primary colors, plus a few others to supplement with as needed. The brand guide defines how each should be used alongside each other.



FONTs: SUBTLE SIGNIFIERS

While we all know color conveys personality, not everyone notices fonts. Yet they do the same, albeit in a subtler way. Fonts should align with the temperament of your brand – rigid or relaxed, angular or curvy, familiar or unusual.

AND THEN...

Pick two For most brands, two are all you need. Select one for headlines (often called a “display” font) and another for body copy. The display font, which tends to be larger and used sparingly, can have more personality than the body.

Or pick one Sometimes the same font works for headlines and body, especially if there are boldness variations (what typographers call “weights”).

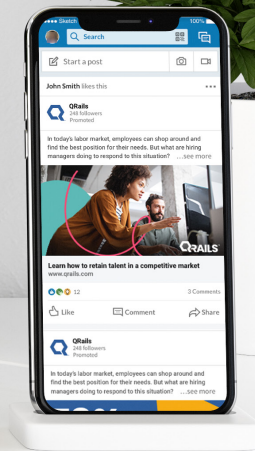
Does it compute? It is wise to pick a font that’s pre-installed on Macs and PCs. Few people will download and install a special font just for your brand. Some larger organizations can get away with it, but the marginal impact usually isn’t worth the cost or effort.

Offer a fallback If you go custom – be sure to offer users a simple, widely available alternative. Think: Calibri, Verdana, or Arial. Something that lets people know exactly what to do instead of breaking the mold (Comic Sans or Papyrus, Yikes!).

CASE IN POINT:

For Chemical Insights, we recommended Exo as its “display” font, and Open Sans for body copy. See how the two pair to capture interest, while not overloading the reader.





A THOUSAND WORDS

Perhaps even more than colors and fonts, images drive the look and feel of a brand – they often take up the most visual real estate, and they're almost always what readers look at first. Since few brands have the luxury of using only their own, exclusive photography, most will need to use stock images.

TRY TO...

Make stock less stock-y When everyone's pulling from the same stock images, how do you make yours distinctive? First, pick a style and stick with it. Perhaps your brand is all about soft-focus images, abstracts, photos with people (or without), "candid" shots, or visual metaphors.

It doesn't have to be a photo Illustrations can be a powerful differentiator. Here, too, pick a style – or even a particular illustrator – and use it consistently.

Apply a treatment A second way to elevate stock is to apply a visual treatment to your images. The options are infinite: a color wash, a gradient, a blur, a "torn" edge, black-and-white, an overlay, a grid, a montage. Use a consistent treatment to make every image distinctly yours.

Think twice about generative AI Audiences demand authenticity from brands they trust. AI technology simply can't achieve that level of substance (yet).

It's iconic Don't leave icons to chance. Designate a style that fits your brand identity. Consider how line weight, corners (sharp/rounded), shape, and fill align with your logo and fonts. Bold icons complement bold images; if your palette and imagery are playful, a sketchy-doodly style may be a perfect fit.

CASE IN POINT:

We created "story lines" for QRails to accentuate its stock photography and brand. The lines guide viewers from the subject's eyes to their device – and also incorporate shapes to add depth.



MAKE IT EASY TO BE CONSISTENT

Everyone in the company uses the brand. From PowerPoints to letterhead to collateral, you want all your content to be on-brand and in-style. Most people want to do things right, but if the rules are complicated, they may not have the time or patience to follow them.

The same goes for finding those assets - make it easy! Otherwise, people are bound to mock up their own or use outdated files.

WHAT THAT MEANS IS...

Start with what's most used A handful of assets likely account for 90% of your brand's design needs. A PowerPoint template, a Word doc, a landing page template.

DAM it all One way to ensure company-wide consistency is a Digital Asset Management system. With a DAM, there's a single location for all brand assets – templates, logos, fonts, icons and images – with the latest version available to all, instantly. Version-control headaches are a thing of the past.

DAM + templates = self-service Some DAMs include templating functionality that allows anyone (with access rights) load text and drop images then – voilà – instant, customized collateral, on-demand.

One more DAM advantage - Built-in tracking and analytics can point out which assets are most used, to help your creative team determine priorities for updates and additions.

CASE IN POINT:

Less is more when it comes to structuring your DAM! The goal is to make it easy for people to find what they need, so they don't give up and go their own way.



LOOK LIKE A MILLION BUCKS

The visual brand expresses who you are and what you stand for. Logo, colors, fonts, images, icons, and templates – combined with other non-visual elements – all work in concert to communicate identity, personality, and values.

Good branding is more than aesthetics. It builds the vibe you want and stimulates an emotional and logical connection. Easy? Not always. Doable? Certainly!

B2B branding that adheres to these five tried-and-true principles... well, that's when marketing starts generating revenue!

Need help building a branding that compels and engages audiences? Let's talk. Reach out to Mike Neumeier at 404.451.7832 or mneumeier@arketi.com.

