New Logo Unveiling: From Simple to the Abstract

Perhaps you have noticed a few changes around the website and newsletter...the new logo (and official, finally, as version 2.0) for Top Hat Word & Index has launched!

In last spring's newsletter, I mentioned the challenges that went into throwing a logo concept together, and the effort to arrive at something that would be unique to the company. I had certain criteria; it had to be something unique and memorable, and give the viewer an idea of what the business is. On a personal level, it has to be something I'd feel a connection with, and I felt it required a certain level of simplicity and "slickness." I thought that if those goals were achieved, I'd be more than happy.
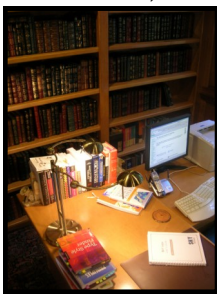
Hopefully we achieve all that criteria with this unveiling.

Ideas for the logo bubbled up from some of the funniest places and most unsuspected sources, and they should be recognized. First, there's no denying that the base concepts for the hat & book derive from online clip art. There's a plethora of it out there. In my research I essentially took two different ideas, applied complete overhauls and modifications to them through Adobe Illustrator and Photoshop, and matched them accordingly.

Unexpectedly, a new idea emerged from what I had to work with: the hat & book could work for the viewer on more than one level. At first glance, the two objects help to give the company name some context. However, if the viewer wishes to give the logo further analysis, the details called out on the book can be analyzed and figured out. On a deeper level, the logo may also be viewed through a conceptually abstract "mirror effect," if one considers themselves as a viewer looking at a viewer, which is in turn looking at another viewer, and we're off to infinity, etc. That idea was inspired by the artwork on Pink Floyd album covers such as *Umma Gumma* and *The Division Bell*.

In the end, however—much to the relief of the company staff—the top hat is no longer lonely. At the very least, he now has a book to read.

More on the New Logo Unveiling: Rings & Credits

Once I had the hat & book artwork at a level I was satisfied with, I moved onto the ring—the portion of the logo that I believe "ties it all together."

I found a classic Americana appeal with the ring, and recall seeing it used on a Rolling Stones t-shirt a few years back. The image was memorable and stuck with me. In the t-shirt that I recall, the ring was surrounding the band's famous tongue logo (designed by Andy Warhol in the early 1970s), and the effect made an impression.

The ring also provides an opportunity to call out the name of the company in the logo, and provides data regarding services the business has to offer. It can be easily modified if necessary.

In theory, the ring is optional...I believe the hat & book portion can survive without it. There will be instances where the ring is not included in an effort to make the hat & book portion pop out more; in printed materials such as business cards, online media, or wherever a tighter space calls for a more minimalist layout.

While I see myself as essentially a self-taught graphic designer with limits in formal instruction, I don't see that reflecting on my abilities—and it certainly doesn't limit my imagination. That being said, I strongly considered hiring a graphic artist to assist me with this logo design, and I had conversations with several of them. I concluded, however, that with this conceptual phase of brainstorming, and in the effort to frame a new logo that reflected the company and my personality, I would not achieve the results I was looking for by hiring out...at least that's the story for this Version 2.0.

I'm not insinuating that this logo was achieved all on my own...it absolutely was not. First, I have numerous folks to thank for input, including KJ (who also came up with the "Top Hat" portion of the company name), my good buddy Todd Wilson and his added perspective, and colleagues at Biznik (one of my primary social networking groups). Specifically, Anita Elder's May 29, 2009 Biznik workshop titled "Let's Design a Logo" at Mosaic Coffee House (front entrance shown below) brought some really helpful insight to what I was looking for—in addition to what I didn't want—which I believe is just as important!

I also wish to thank Michiko Stehrenberger, also a Biznik colleague and graphic artist who took the time to review and critique my draft. Just when I thought I had nearly arrived at the final version, she gave great suggestions that completely enhanced the logo to give it a much-improved makeover. Her thoughts relating to the use of color, in addition to suggesting that the hat & book "pop out" of the ring, helped to achieve a bolder design.
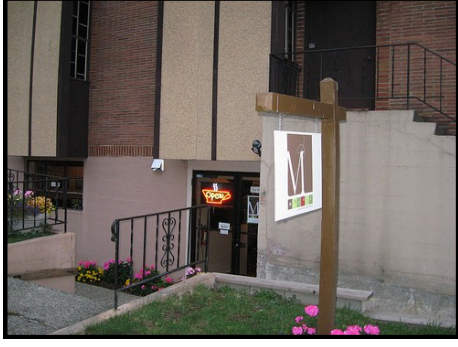
Last, but not least, I believe that if I didn't have access to today's technological tools; such as the Internet to fetter through conceptual ideas and clip art, and the Adobe CS3 suite to bring the elements from my head to the screen, this project would have evolved very differently with a less desirable result, I'm sure.

I consider myself blessed to be surrounded by such a great support group, and to have these tools at my disposal.

Logo evolution: clip art
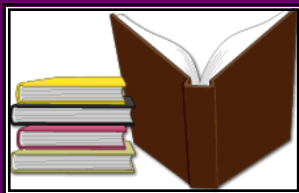
This piece of online clip art was the final nail in the coffin, if you will, conceptually...one of those "Ah ha!" moments.

The book in the logo is a modified version of what you see. For months, between peer review groups and other ideas, I'd struggled to come up with something simple that worked.

This offered the balance of what I'd been looking for: put the top hat in an action-oriented setting, and make it simple.

You can find out more about us at Top Hat Word & Index by visiting our website, and to see samples for our indexing, technical writing, and editing work. Also be sure to check out testimonials from past clients!

Logo evolution: Adobe Illustrator

The sample above reveals an early prototype of the "ring" portion of the logo (upper right).

Using Adobe Illustrator, I noodled around with various design ideas and combinations before arriving at something I was happy with.

I keep the final design in several formats to accommodate print and online settings, and to also maintain Illustrator files to apply possible future changes.

As it turned out, I ended up going through three versions of this logo before arriving at a final design I was happy with...but as the article to the left reveals, I don't feel compelled to give credit to just a handful of software tools!

Top Hat Word & Index is happy to support and partner with the following nonprofit organizations:

- Caring Clowns International
- Children International
- Mountains to Sound Greenway
- National Resources Defense Council
- Seattle Bookfest '09
- Seattle Green Festival
- Sky Island Alliance
- World Wildlife Fund