

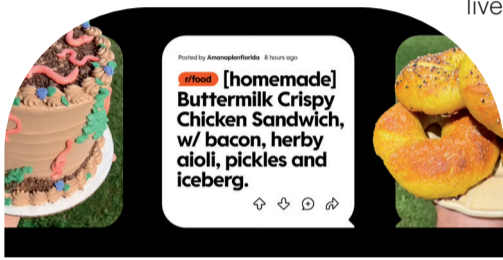
The Obsession with Logo-as-Window



Lately I've noticed a major trend in branding and advertising projects: designers are crafting beautiful logos, only to turn them into frames for photographs and videos, an approach Brand New calls "logo-as-window." Even Pentagram, the paragon of design innovation, used this design trick for roughly two of every three branding projects with images released throughout 2023. In their Reddit rebrand, you see

lively, community-oriented photos embedded inside the Reddit chat icon. It grows and expands to fill with conversation, ideas, and images. While effective in connecting Reddit to its users, the logo-as-window trend raises larger questions: Is this a creative shortcut? A means of storytelling? Or is it a signal that we're struggling to redefine the role of logos in branding today?

to their services). In the case of Reddit, the images positioned inside the brand icon suggest that the user is joining a welcoming, dynamic community—but this is a simplification of Reddit's very complex, and sometimes divisive reality. In our post-truth age, where social media has reframed our trust dynamics, logos alone can no longer deliver what audiences now expect: a sense of connection, humanity, and inclusion. This is what allows logo-as-window to thrive. These "relatable" visuals go beyond digital brands, affecting everything from social media platforms to financial institutions like HSBC. These companies—once trusted names with authoritative logos—now incorporate photos of softer, more human-centered design to signal a connection with consumers.



THE PATTERN AT PLAY

Pentagram's Reddit work is emblematic of an underlying pattern in the graphic design industry. As Elizabeth Goodspeed explains in her 2022 AIGA article, "the gap between sign-off and execution is where the moodboard comes in." Art directors frequently use moodboards when pressed for time, to capture their client's vision before any image creation begins. This "flat circle" leads to sameness in branding campaigns, as designers rely on familiar themes and motifs to speed up the design process. Logos, once sacred symbols of identity and authority, are now recast as hollow frames for storytelling.



In the days of modernist logo ideals (though have we completely left this time?), designers would charge hefty fees and spend countless hours designing the perfect logomark to use as an authoritative stamp. These symbols were meant to encapsulate a brand's identity and company's values in a single, abstract form. But today, branding demands more, and clients no longer have a pedestal for the mark. As advertising and marketing have become paramount, branding now means storytelling, and logos must accommodate images. Cropping an image in a branded shape is an easy fix that still allows for bold and graphic logos, though at the expense of the logo's originality.

BEYOND THE MARK

Next we can consider the imagery that appears within these logos is rarely directly connected to the product being sold. Instead, we see idealized scenes of happiness, inclusion, or aspiration, subtly indicating to the prospective customer that buying into the brand will lead to a specific kind of better life (such as Verizon connecting fresh produce

WHAT'S NEXT?

Logo-as-window represents a transitional phase in branding: a subconscious compromise between the modernist desire for iconic marks and the contemporary need for narrative-driven design. It's a bigger signal of the world beyond graphic design. The authority and competence that effective logos conjure up is no longer viewed with trust or seen as desirable. Social media has programmed us to trust influencers over corporate authorities, and the age of disinformation has made us second-guess everything.

The demand for storytelling in marketing is about pulling at the heartstrings of consumers and making them believe in an alternative idealized reality that only that specific product can bring. Logo-as-window has signaled a need for more critical engagement with the role of imagery in branding (though the question around using our practice to make companies in hot water feel relatable is a discussion for

another time). The mark can no longer stand on its own, and we should strive for systems that balance and incorporate a bold visual identity with meaningful narrative.

