

The Impact of Branding and Marketing Strategies on Events with Sole

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Abstract

The Impact of Branding and Marketing Strategies on Events with Sole

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The purpose of this study was to research current marketing, branding, and social media strategies and apply those to Events with Sole, a nonprofit organization that establishes running and multisport races in Northern California. This study explored the impact of these strategies on nonprofit organizations and the importance of sustaining a brand identity. More specifically, this research defined effective logo design for nonprofits, and based on collected data, provided suggestions for potential improvements to be made to the current Events with Sole branding. This research also provided suggestions for improvements to be made to social media strategy and marketing tactics, in order to further define the organization as the premier athletic event provider in Northern California. This research is important in discovering how artistic and strategic decisions should be made in today's nonprofit sector.

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Chapter 1

A nonprofit can make the greatest impact if its brand is in cohesion with the organization's purpose. A brand is important to an organization because it is essential to establishing and retaining partnerships, donors, supporters, and cultivating other forms of participation. This is especially unique to nonprofits because they are sustained by the contributions of others. The authors of an article in the Stanford Social Innovation Review define a brand, as “embody[ing] the identity of the organization, encapsulating its mission, values, and distinctive activities” (Kylander and Stone, 2012). This is including, but not limited to, logo design, a social media presence, and other marketing strategies. A brand enhances the visual identity of an organization and is also more broadly defined as “a psychological construct held in the minds of all those aware of the branded product, person, organization, or movement” (Kylander and Stone, 2012). This psychological construct is what motivates supporters to practice brand loyalty and, in turn, aids in the profitability and growth of a nonprofit organization. This research project will study the effectiveness of certain aspects of branding such as successful logo design and a social media presence.

Specifically, this research project's focus was on the nonprofit organization Events with Sole, which is an organization that establishes running and multisport races in the Northern California wine country. As described on the Events with Sole race information website, otherwise known as Run Wine Country, “Events with Sole exists to encourage and support increased levels of participation in quality sporting events through its events. This nonprofit organization benefits the community by producing outstanding events that raise money that is donated to local and national charities” (Events with Sole, 2013). Founder, Brad Illing said “Events with Sole aims to be the premier athletic event provider in Northern California due to

the beautiful courses in the wine country, post-event wine, beer, food, and music, and a great reputation of providing seamless, fun, and beautiful races”. The following research identifies the importance of brand awareness, and the avenues the nonprofit must take in order to enhance branding efforts.

Events with Sole’s audience base is broad because running and multisport events attract athletes and race-goers of all ages and from all over the world. However, Northern California, and more specifically, the Sonoma County community, is a large portion of the intended audience. Sonoma County is the primary beneficiary of the fundraising efforts of Events with Sole, though the nonprofit also gives back to national charities. Those benefitting from the donations given by Events with Sole, in addition to the volunteers and those willing to donate their services to or sponsor the races, are included in the projected target audience.

The purpose of this study was to perform market research on Events with Sole and its competitors in order to improve upon Events with Sole’s current marketing and branding strategies. Additionally, this study sought to discover how effective social media is in the marketing of a company, and whether or not it is necessary to implement social media strategies into the marketing of Events with Sole. The study explored successful logo design, and based on collected data, provided suggestions for improvements to be made to the current Events with Sole branding. Implementing these improvements will help to further define Events with Sole as the premier athletic event provider in Northern California by enhancing the organization’s brand identity and recognition, therefore increasing attendance at events and loyalty among supporters.

Running and multisport races have existed for quite some time, but the emergence of digital technology has aided in the development of new ways to market organizations and remain competitive in a large industry. Events with Sole must continue to develop its marketing and

branding strategies in order to differentiate itself from other race providers. Events with Sole engages the community by advertising its events on Active.com, maintaining and updating a website, sending out occasional emails, and running a Facebook page. There are many ways to become involved in the nonprofit such as volunteering at, donating to, and sponsoring events. Events with Sole donates thousands of dollars a year to many causes including, but not limited to Windsor Unified School District, Girls on the Run, Healdsburg Food Pantry, Eagle Pride Boosters, Empire Runners, local fire departments, school swim teams, Redwood Gospel Mission, and The Empire Food Bank. Events with Sole could benefit from improving branding and marketing strategies to continue to grow awareness of the nonprofit. This would lead to the recognition of Events with Sole as a trusted premier race provider in Northern California, further betterment of the community's health and involvement, and increased donations to charities in need.

Chapter 2

According to the Association of Small Foundations (2011), “the nonprofit sector now encompasses 1.5 million organizations.” Nonprofits are thriving in today’s society but have to compete against a multitude of other nonprofits and for-profit companies to stay competitive. The Association of Small Foundations (2011), explained, when deciding where to invest “donors tend to consider two questions... the donor’s philanthropic goals and the nonprofit’s effectiveness”. In order to effectively market a nonprofit’s philanthropic goals, it is important to have clear branding, which includes but is not limited to an organization’s name, slogan, design scheme, and logo. The extent by which a brand is recognized and understood by customers is a key element to an organization becoming well known and distinguishable. Therefore, making it more likely for donors, volunteers, and other customers to remember the nonprofit and be inclined to become involved. Effective marketing of a nonprofit includes successful logo design, web design, social media, email marketing, and communication strategies.

A compelling logo is crucial in gaining recognition of a nonprofit. When designing a logo it is important to consider the target audience in order to properly market to them. As Jacob Cass mentions in a Smashing Magazine (2009) article, “a good logo is distinctive, appropriate, practical, graphic and simple in form, and it conveys the owner’s intended message”. When designing a logo, simplicity is imperative. A company logo must be adaptable to many different sizes and aesthetically pleasing not only in color, but also in black and white. It is especially important for a nonprofit that the logo communicates the cause in a captivating way. A nonprofit’s logo:

should not just be instantly recognizable, but also offer a clear and compelling narrative that people will remember. However, if your logo looks like everyone else’s logo, you

stop saying anything at all. If all nonprofits see themselves as helping people and the planet, you don't really communicate anything valuable by focusing on such a generic theme. (Scharpnick, 2012)

When designing a logo, it is important the logo remains unique and identifiable, and speaks to the company's values, cause, and target audience. An organization's brand identity reaches far beyond its logo, but it is important to understand that the logo is a lens into the psychological brand a company owns, and is the first glimpse into the organization that a potential supporter will see. Therefore, a logo that is universal, memorable, and adheres to typography and design principles is very important.

In addition to logo design, web design is another crucial aspect of a nonprofit's success. It is important to ask, does the website clearly convey the narrative of the nonprofit organization? In answering this, the target market must be known. Furthermore, the mission statement should be prominent on the website, and the site should have clear navigation. An easily navigable website should also include contact information, page updates, and a privacy statement. Content is key and it drives design and usability. One of the most important aspects of the website is to make sure your organization's purpose is immediately apparent. Chapman (2012), explains:

nonprofit websites share many of the same best practices as any website... But often a nonprofit website needs to offer more than your typical corporate site. A nonprofit's website needs to make it easy to find out more about their cause, to donate money, and to become more involved. It needs to make it easy for media contacts to find the information they need and the contact information of key personnel. And it needs to do all this in a way that's inviting to the organization's targeted donors and/or volunteers.

A key element of a nonprofit website is the donation page. This page must be prominently linked in the website and apparent to the user. It is also important to make the donation process as simple as possible. In addition to donations, volunteers greatly help nonprofits. A volunteer-friendly site helps visitors easily find information on how to get involved. A website's "design should revolve around content and mission, not the other way around" (Chapman, 2009). The implications of a well designed and purposeful website are improved brand integrity and awareness.

A website is a critical component of a brand, but it is important to consider and utilize other marketing channels as well. As Au and Tipton (2011), mention, "you [may] still need newsletters, press releases, direct mail pieces, and personal contacts." Those marketing tactics are personalized and still valued by many people today. While considering other marketing channels, it is important to also consider social media outlets. Creating social media accounts for a nonprofit is strategic in helping to create awareness of the cause, whether via Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Pinterest, or other social media outlets. Events with Sole could make improvements through strategic brand building, fundraising and awareness platforms and campaigns, marketing promotions, and social media campaigns. The nonprofit could enhance donations and volunteer rates through personal success stories, a growing email list, communicating regularly to customers or potential customers, and maximizing fundraising efforts. Additionally, as explained by Convio, Inc. (2010), email is great for nonprofits because it is "relatively inexpensive... has immediacy... yields quick results... gives you new insights... allows you to send personalized messages... and allows you to segment and test offers." When a nonprofit utilizes a wide range of social media outlets, it is more likely to build a strong and trusted brand identity, and reach more potential supporters. Convio (2010) also explains social

media as “what started out as a way to reconnect with friends and family has grown into a means for nonprofit organizations to spread awareness about key issues, mobilize supporters, raise funds and create online advocacy movements.” Social media has changed the way people interact with brands, and can be utilized to enhance brand awareness. These concrete branding tactics offer an indication to the potential supporter of the brand’s prominence, ethics, integrity, and strength.

Chapter 3

The goal of this study was to find the most effective way to brand and market the nonprofit Events with Sole to emphasize its purpose and cultivate more participation and growth. According to the National Center for Charitable Statistics there are over a million nonprofits that account for 9.2% of all wages and salaries in the United States. The industry is competitive, therefore a nonprofit must differentiate itself through its branding efforts which includes but is not limited to logo design, an appealing and user-friendly website, and social media strategy.

The objective of this study was to perform market research on the nonprofit Events with Sole through mass surveys and outside research. The survey consisted of multiple-choice and short answer questions that explored what it means to have an effective or ineffective logo, the strength of Events with Sole's current logo, and the importance of a social media presence. The survey also required respondents to rank specific elements of logo design on importance. This helped to identify what potential customers value in a logo, and what they find most crucial in order to attract them or convince them to support a brand. The survey's purpose was to validate Events with Sole's opportunities to grow and further enhance brand identity and awareness through effective logo design and social media use. This information was gathered in order to help determine what the audience preferred as far as logo design and social media.

This data was used to determine what recommended changes Events with Sole could make to increase its success, profitability, and brand presence. The results were presented in graphic and tabular and include age and sex demographics in order to provide more thorough information and findings.

Chapter 4

The purpose of this study was to research current marketing, branding, and social media strategies and apply those to Events with Sole. This study explored the impact of these strategies on nonprofit organizations and the importance of sustaining a brand identity. More specifically, this research defined effective logo design for nonprofits, and based on collected data, provided suggestions for improvements to be made to the current Events with Sole branding, in order to further define the organization as the premier athletic event provider in Northern California. This research is important in discovering how artistic and strategic decisions should be made in today's nonprofit sector. From the survey, which was a combination of multiple choice and short answer questions, 174 responses were collected.

From this study, one can draw several conclusions about the rebranding efforts that Events with Sole could undertake. Out of all the responses, 62 percent of survey responses were visits from PC's and laptops, 34 percent from smartphones, three percent from tablets, and one percent from other devices. With the increasing focus on and use of technology today, it is important that organizations focus on reaching customers through these channels. One of the survey questions asked "Which form(s) of social media would you be most likely to follow a nonprofit organization on?" The responses were segmented as follows: 43 percent said Facebook, whereas 26 percent said Instagram. Events with Sole doesn't currently have an Instagram account. These findings could encourage Events with Sole to pursue the advertising of the company through Instagram and potentially reach more untouched customers than before, or better retain current customers. Additionally, nine percent of people said they would follow a nonprofit on LinkedIn, and another nine percent said they would follow a nonprofit on Twitter. These are two other viable options for Events with Sole to pursue in order to better promote

themselves and increase awareness of the brand. Out of all the survey respondents, 76 percent of responses were from people in the age range of 18-25 years old, four percent were 18 years and younger, five percent were 50-55 years old, four percent were 45-50 years old, three percent were 55-60 years old, two percent were 25-30 years old, two percent were 60 years and older, two percent were 30-35 years old, one percent was 35-40 years old, and one percent were 40-45 years old. Of those who took the survey, 79 percent were female and 21 percent were male. With that in mind, the majority of respondents believe a logo must be simple, unique, adaptable to all mediums, and timeless in order to be effective. The respondents were all given Events with Sole's current logo to look at and determine whether or not they thought it was effective. There was a wide range of responses and diverse opinions. Please see the appendices for graphical representations of responses and a list of some of the short answer responses.

Identifying a target audience and catering to that audience is a key factor in creating an effective logo and branding identity. The survey reflects the responses of a portion of the intended audience. Events with Sole's intended audience is males or females from the ages of 15 to 65 years old. It is important to keep in mind that the entirety of the intended audience is not entirely reflected in the survey results.

Chapter 5

From this study, one can draw many conclusions about brand awareness and Event's with Sole's current marketing and branding strategies. Brand awareness is essential to a nonprofit because it attracts customers and encourages them to continue to support a nonprofit. A simple but eye-catching and memorable logo is an important component to the overall success of a business. Based on survey responses, one can define general themes about what makes a logo effective or non-effective, and the effectiveness of Events with Sole's current logo design. This study showed a group of 174 potential customer's opinions about branding, logo design, and social media tactics.

Many of the respondents had similar ideas about what made a good logo design to them, and therefore what would interest them most when choosing a company to support. Overall, respondents believed a logo should be memorable, simple but eye-catching, and unique. They believed an effective logo reflects the lifestyle and values of the demographic the company is trying to attract. Generally, they also believed it must have a universal meaning, great design, suitable font, and proper color use. Please see Appendix D for a list of some of the specific responses.

Similarly, many of the respondents had similar ideas about what made a logo ineffective to them. For instance, many said too much detail, when a logo is too generic or dated, and lack of clarity. Appendix C has a list of some of the specific responses for reference.

The survey also displayed Events with Sole's current logo and asked respondents what they liked or didn't like about the logo. Generally, surveyors felt the organization's name was unique, catchy, and clever. However, they felt the figure was ambiguous and the typeface too heavy. Some people suggested the logo should better represent the organization's name and be a

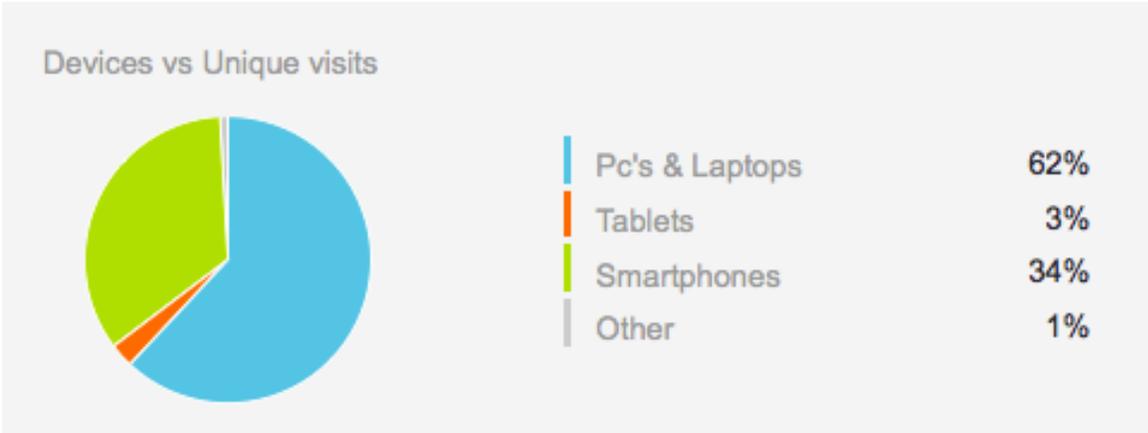
sole of a running shoe rather than the outline of a male runner's body. Some respondents felt this would bring more clarity to the organization's purpose and goals, while also attracting a wider audience. Please see Appendix B for a list of some of the responses from respondents.

This study also briefly explored social media practices Events with Sole could incorporate into their current social media strategy. Integrating a Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn presence could increase the visibility of Events with Sole's long-term goals while also strengthening its brand awareness and identification.

Kylander and Stone, authors of *The Role of Brand in the Nonprofit Sector*, an article in the Stanford Social Innovation Review, presented findings from an 18-month research project led by themselves and their colleagues at Harvard University's Hauser Center for Nonprofit Organizations and collaborators at the Rockefeller Foundation. They analyzed and presented information about the meaning and importance of branding after interviewing nonprofit executives, communication directors, consultants, and donors. Kylander and Stone (2012), found that "many nonprofits continue to use their brands primarily as a fundraising tool, but a growing number of nonprofits are developing a broader and more strategic approach, managing their brands to create greater social impact and tighter organizational cohesion." It is important that a nonprofit is widely recognizable in order to "[drive] broad, long-term social goals, while strengthening internal identity, cohesion, and capacity" (Kylander and Stone, 2012). Events with Sole will use the information gathered in this research to leverage the brand identity for the betterment of the nonprofit, the community, and the beneficiaries of the nonprofit. These survey results were sent to the founder of the nonprofit and will be used as seen fit and in the best interest of the organization's current marketing and branding strategies. The founder of Events with Sole plans to take the recommendations under consideration and look into making changes

to the logo as well as determining what would be required to begin to utilize some of the discussed social media outlets. This research validates the importance of social media use and successful logo design, and will be used in the prospective improvement of Events with Sole's current approach to its current marketing tactics. As the graphic communication industry is constantly changing and adapting to new approaches of branding and marketing, studying these strategies is important in discovering how artistic and strategic decisions should be made in today's nonprofit sector, and specifically for Events with Sole.

Appendix A: Graphical Representation of survey results for multiple-choice questions created on Typeform



What age range are you in?

171 out of 171 people answered this question

1	18-25	135 / 79%
2	18 and under	7 / 4%
3	45-50	6 / 4%
4	50-55	6 / 4%
5	25-30	4 / 2%
6	55-60	4 / 2%
7	60 and over	4 / 2%
8	30-35	3 / 2%
9	35-40	1 / 1%
10	40-45	1 / 1%
▲	Show less	

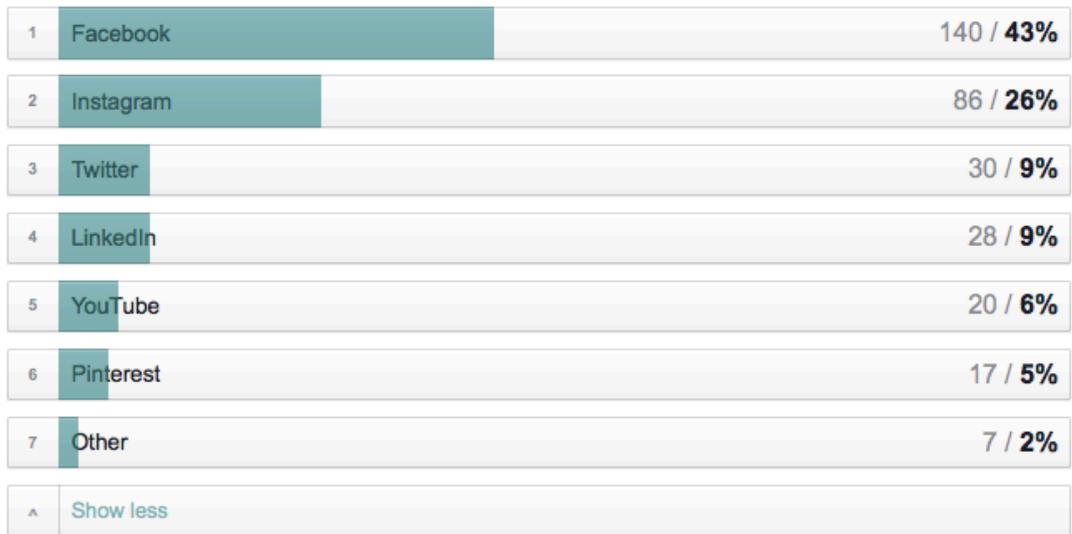
What is your gender?

171 out of 171 people answered this question



Which form(s) of social media would you be most likely to follow a nonprofit organization on?

171 out of 171 people answered this question

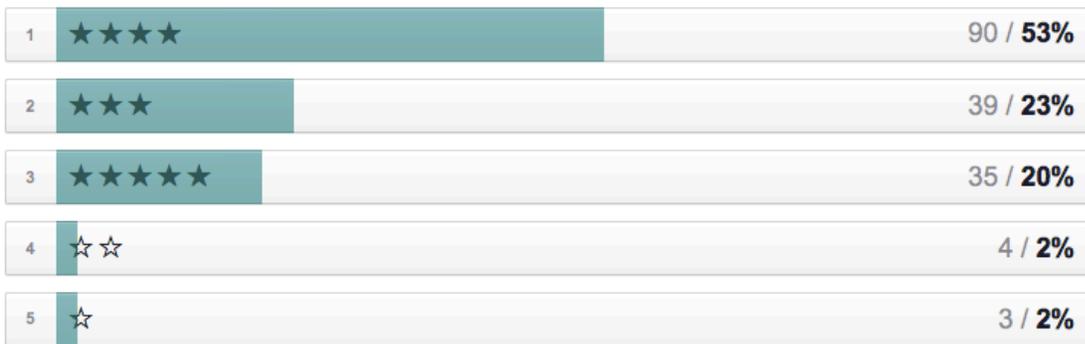


How important do you believe simplicity is to a company's successful logo design?

171 out of 171 people answered this question



► Hide detail

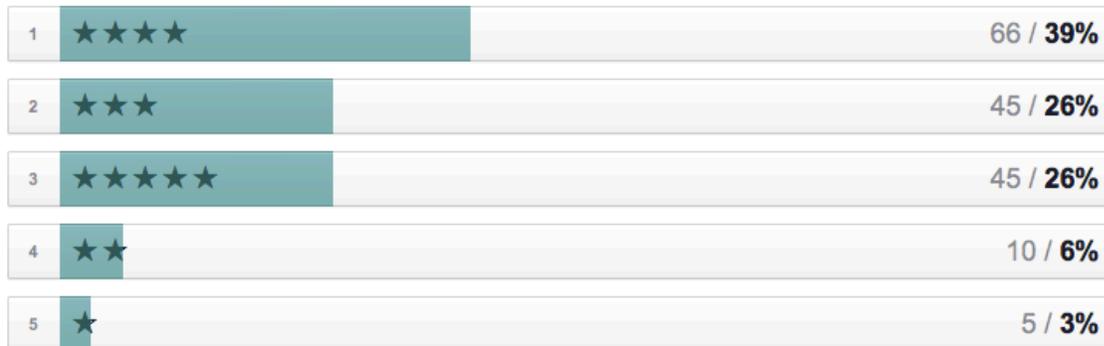


How important do you believe it is for a company's logo to be timeless, in order to be effective?

171 out of 171 people answered this question



► Hide detail

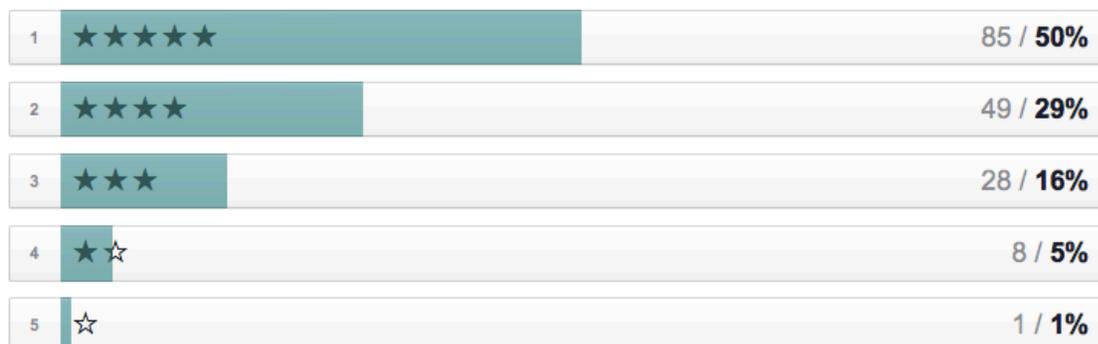


How important do you believe it is for a company's logo to be adaptable (to different sizes and mediums) in order to be successful?

171 out of 171 people answered this question



► Hide detail

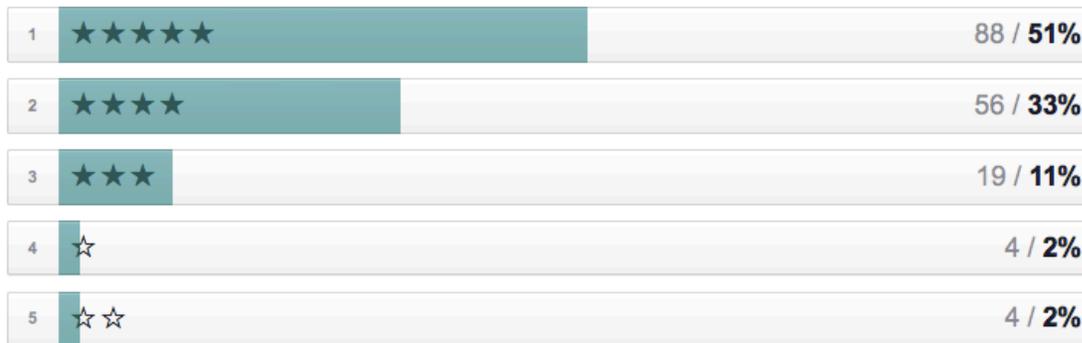


How important do you believe it is for a company's logo to be unique, in order to be effective?

171 out of 171 people answered this question



► Hide detail



Appendix B: A selection of short-answer results from the survey in response to the question, “What do you like or not like about this logo design?” (When referring to Events with Sole’s current logo design- See below)



- “The figure is too ambiguous”
- “Very cool, I would like to see the runner incorporated into the text”
- “Type is a little boring”
- “Typeface may be too heavy”
- “Some elements are too close in proximity”

- “Running emphasis is clearly defined, clever soul/sole wording”
- “Puns are great, so that makes it pretty fantastic. Also, it is easy for me to have a pretty good idea about what the company does just from the logo.”
- “Overall too heavy handed, no sensitivity to font weight, line weights, form or shape. It’s a nonprofit that uses support to support other causes. The heavy weighted font appears to be ‘grounded’ and unmoving.”
- “Looks dated”
- “I like the simplicity but I dislike the fact they are talking about “Sole” and featuring a runner, not a running shoe or something similar”
- “Good with only two colors. Easy to understand and simple. Easily recognizable at a glance and to understand what the logo/company stands for.”
- “Don’t like font.”
- “It is an odd shape. Maybe incorporate the running figure into the type.”

Appendix C: A selection of short-answer results from the survey in response to the question, “What do you think makes a logo ineffective?”

- “An inability to understand what it represents.”
- “Plain or too much going on.”
- “When a logo is generic or close to another logo. It shouldn’t look like it was mechanically generated. It should be unique and different.”
- “Too much detail.”

- “It can’t be used on all merchandise.”
- “Too busy, too many letters, too many colors.”
- “If it is dated.”
- “Lack of creativity.”
- “Ineffective logos are generic and/or busy. Misuse of colors or using too many colors is also unattractive for logos.”
- “Not distinct, too crowded or blurry.”
- “A logo is ineffective if it doesn’t communicate brand values.”
- “Lack of clarity.”
- “Unable to resize effectively; can’t reproduce with only one color and keep legibility; typography looks dated; logo in general looks dated; too much going on; needs more simplicity.”

Appendix D: A selection of short-answer results from the survey in response to the question, “What do you think makes a logo effective?”

- “The logo should be eye-catching, make sense and be memorable.”
- “Relevant connection and clear communication of the identity or mission of the product or organization.”
- “Recognizable, eye-catching.”
- “Design, fonts, clarity, colors, simplicity.”
- “Simplicity and message.”

- “Universal meaning and understanding.”
- “Simplicity, cleanliness, and cleverness.”
- “An effective logo is one that reflects the lifestyle and values of the demographic that is tries to target. For instance, a very modern, contemporary look to attract the younger generation.”
- “Something that gets at why the viewer would want to support the business.”
- “The best logos are simple. The best logos are memorable. The strongest brands own the smallest building blocks. (e.g. Facebook owns Facebook blue)”
- “Clarity, intelligent messaging, and easy to look at.”
- “It has a clear message.”
- “Striking. Interesting. Unique!”
- “Something memorable that portrays what it’s representing.”
- “When there is something different about it. Something people haven’t seen before or something that draws your eye in and you can recognize it from far away or up close.”
- “Use of color that attracts the eye, and the addition of something unique that is memorable for the future.”

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