The High Tide Inn Rebrand

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Introduction

For my Senior Project, I found a small Inn in Maine that was just purchased by a new owner. The previous owner of The High Tide Inn was very old and had owned the Inn for a long time, running on word of mouth and the quaint charm of the location. Their website was not a priority and had not been updated in decades. It was not mobile friendly, up to date, or easy to navigate. The logo reflects a charming sign on the property, but does not translate well digitally. In addition to this, there is no vector file of the logo but just an incredibly pixelated logo in JPEG format. The new owners know their brand needs some updates but do not know where to start. It is important for their brand to reflect the rich history of the Inn to cater to the families who had made a tradition of coming every summer for years, but the new owners know there are changes that need to be made. Some of the on-site facilities are very outdated and they would like to increase bookings and increase rates to improve profitability to fund updates to the Inn.

In this project, I have a few different goals to refresh The High Tide Inn brand. I will start with updating the logo for legibility and recognition as well as creating brand guidelines to refer to through the rest of the process. Next, I will break down the website organization and design goals and work with the web developer to implement these things. I will also use the created brand guidelines to start the social media accounts for the Inn to create a social media presence. Small, printed elements for the Inn including coasters and some merch would be my next step so customers have memorabilia to take home with them.

Through my research of branding, I believe strongly that a cohesive and updated brand will allow The High Tide Inn to reach its goals. The word of Bastos and Levy (2012) describes the basic concept of branding: “Branding is usually done by using some kind of mark placed either directly on the object or indirectly on a label (e.g. a slip, a flap, a patch) that is affixed to
the object.” This is why I think the logo is a critical place to start in this project as it is usually tied with a customer’s first impression of the brand. In addition, the brand needs to extend to the website, social media and branded materials. Rowley (2004) writes that the best way to design a website is brand focused: “Design the Web site to reinforce and communicate a brand…Whilst effective Web site design remains important in terms of usability, the central focus in the branding process is on communication and messages.” I plan to focus on these elements throughout my project.

The results for this project can be measured in a few ways. I will conduct a survey for usability of the website and user satisfaction with the site. I will include questions comparing the new state to the old state of the site, logo and more. I can measure the social media following and website analytics to test the success of my project as well. The legibility of the logo and consistency of the brand are also markers of success in the project.

**Figure 1:** Timeline

**Literature**

A Graphic Communication theory I used heavily throughout this project were the Gestalt Principles. The Gestalt Principles are a set of perception principles created by German psychologist Kurt Koffka and named Gestalt for its German translation to “form” or “shape” (Wong, 2010). The most commonly recognized principles include closure, common fate,
figure-ground relationship, good continuation, Law of Prägnanz, proximity and similarity. Wong (2010) wrote “The fundamental concept behind these principles is grouping; we tend to perceive objects that look alike, are placed close together, connected by lines or enclosed in a common space as belonging together. These are simple but powerful ways to build context for information.” The three principles I mainly focused on during my design process were similarity, proximity, and figure-ground relationship.

Similarity is an element of the Gestalt principles of perception asserting that “Elements that are similar are perceived to be more related than elements that are dissimilar” (Lidwell, Holden, & Butler, 2010). Elements can be made similar through different elements such as their color, size, or shape. In an experiment conducted by Moore and Egeth (1997), the principle of similarity was proven to have an effect on memory, stating, “Participants showed evidence of having experienced the Müller-Lyer illusion when the patterns formed arrowheads. These results indicate that despite the ‘participants’ inability to report what the patterns were, grouping by similarity did occur.” Their experiments showed that people group objects that are similar even when they are not completely paying attention. Designers use this principle to their advantage by making similar information look similar in ways such as color. For example, when looking at Google Maps, certain types of locations are shown in specific colors and with specific symbols. All gardens, hikes, golf courses and nature-related locations have a green marker which allows the user to easily recognize green locations as places for outdoor recreation. Markets, stores and other places to shop are made similar through their blue markers and delis, restaurants, and cafes have orange markers. The user has an easier time finding a place to eat on the map because they can filter out other colors through their dissimilarity.
A second element of Gestalt principles of perception that has a strong impact on a user’s understanding is proximity. Proximity can be described as “Items relating to each other should be grouped close together. When several items are in close proximity to each other, they become one visual unit rather than several separate units. This helps organize information, reduces clutter, and gives the reader a clear structure” (Williams, 2004). When used effectively, proximity can help users find and understand information with ease. In addition to this, the lack of proximity through the inclusion of negative space can separate items. Not only is this effective for similar text or images, but it is important to use with multimedia information as well. Research shows “When readers interact with complex messages, they have to read the text and scan the illustration, process both to derive meaning, search for referents and mentally integrate the contents. This process can be cognitively demanding if the two sources of information are placed far from each other” (Holsanova, Holmberg, and Holmqvist, 2009). An example of this would be on a remote control. Numbers are close in proximity while other buttons such as play and pause are further away in their own grouping.

Figure-ground is another Gestalt principle that refers to the relationship where “The figure has an object-like character, whereas the ground has less perceptual saliency and appears as 'mere' background. The areas of the figure and the ground usually do not appear juxtaposed in a common plane, as in a mosaic, but rather as stratified in depth: there is a tendency to see the figure as positioned in front, and the ground at a further depth plane and continuing to extend behind the figure, as if occluded by it” (Todorovic, 2008). This can be helpful to differentiate different elements from each other. It can be done with size, to make an element bigger and seemingly closer to elevate its importance, contrast to draw attention to the most important element, or even blurred backgrounds as the ground element while the clear elements act as the
figure. The most common example many are familiar is described by Wylant “Such ambiguities are visible, for example, in the image of the vase/face pairing, with which many people are familiar. These visuals hold a figure/ground reversibility, so that one readily seen figure can also be perceived as ground” (2016). These visual cues allow users to pull the information they need to see from a background, but it does require a clear difference between figure and ground. An example of this would be a yin-yang shape. Does the user’s eye first go towards the black shape or the negative space of the white? Designers can use both perceptions in their work to best portray the information.

Gestalt psychology has led to a multitude of principles that are key to Graphic Communication practices. These elements show us how “The mind perceives and organizes holistically and finds patterns in that which appears to be unconnected” (Dabner, Calvert, Casey and Dabner, 2010). The psychology behind these principles allow us to best understand information we are presented with, and how we can help others to understand it through the nature of our design choices.

**Synthesis**

Gestalt principles have played a huge role in design choices I have made throughout my senior project. With The High Tide Inn brand, it was important to use proven Graphic Communication elements to justify design choices. With usability and brand understanding at the forefront of this project, the Gestalt principles helping to allow users to group and comprehend information are a key factor. I used similarity, proximity, and figure-ground throughout my rebranding process, especially in web design and logo creation.

Similarity was an element mainly used to group related information on the website. The original website did not make use of similarity correctly, as all links were made to look similar.
This would confuse the website’s users because they could not easily find information since it all looked the same. This is an example of how too much similarity can also be a bad thing, and I made this a large focus of mine in the creation of my website layout. I began writing out all the pages and sections of the website and then grouped them into related categories. I assigned each category multiple elements of similarity. At the top of the website, I created a menu where the most important pages can be navigated to. They are marked as similar through their color and font. Other information such as the description of each type of room offered at the Inn are marked as similar through their text layout, image size, and colored background, which group all these elements to signify their similarity.

The next element I incorporated into my website was proximity. Much like similarity, I chose to use this element because it allows users to group similar information mentally. At the top of the page, I included some social icons to link to the Inn’s Instagram and Facebook. Though the icons are not similar looking in color, their proximity points to their relationship. These elements are not close in proximity to any other elements, and there is quite a bit of negative space around them, which allows the user to visually group them into a similar category. Another place where proximity can be found on the new website design is in the hierarchy of information. The logo is where the eye will first jump to since it is the largest text and is placed at the top of the page. Because of this, the proximity of other elements can determine the reader’s perception of their importance. The original site had the date and location closest to the logo, and the button to book was placed very far away. Since a user is not likely going to the website to find the date but hopefully instead to book a room, this proximity does not make much sense. In my website, I moved the button to book closest to the logo at the top of
the page as well as the site contents, as these are used most for site navigation. The proximity to the logo emphasizes the importance and groups the items at the top of the page.

The figure-ground principle was what I focused on in my logo process. The original High Tide Inn logo consists of an oval with an elaborate typeface with the brand name and a multicolor image. After talking to my peers, I came to the understanding that because of the intricate shapes and colors of the image in the logo, it was not only ineffective and unmemorable, but the image was unrecognizable. Some thought it was a cliff, rock, or even a swing set. Due to this, I used figure-ground relationships to make a logo that was clearly recognizable as a tree and sailboat (which is what the original logo attempted to depict). I simplified the logo to be a single color line drawing, and pulled the text below so the image could be its own shape. The resulting logo has an object-like element to it, that allows the user to clearly tell what the image is and read the text.

The use of Gestalt principles creates a better brand for The High Tide Inn through allowing the customer to better understand the services and identity. A classic look can still be emphasized in a way that doesn’t make the brand feel outdated, and is still important to the history of the Inn. Creating a classic brand image requires a return to simplicity that can be done by focusing on principles of Gestalt psychology. It helps us to organize pieces of visual information into a whole, similar to taking elements of a company and mentally organizing them into a brand (Wong, 2010). The High Tide Inn brand evolves from the updates of all of its elements through cues.

**Results**

The results of my project were very successful. I started by doing some research into hotels in Camden and other hotels that I thought had good branding. I studied the setup of their
websites and what did or didn't work with each one. I also looked at what kinds of marketing materials they were producing and considered what would be the best investment for High Tide Inn. I defined my deliverables as branding guidelines, website homepage, Instagram account, coasters, and other printed merchandise. I got to work creating a moodboard with photos of branding examples I liked and lifestyle photos that created a tone for the brand.

![Moodboard](image)

**Figure 2: Moodboard**

My next step was to create brand guidelines, including color palette, fonts, and logo. When starting with a color palette, I chose nautical colors to represent the sailing culture of this East-Coast town. The brand colors of navy, red, and creme create a sophisticated and retro aesthetic for the brand. I also added a shade of lighter blue and a bluish-green color to represent the sky and the trees.
I next started sketching out ideas for the logo that used elements from the original logo to create brand consistency. I created about 8 options for my client because I wasn’t sure how willing they were to stray from their original logo. They ended up choosing a logo most similar to the original logo, but much simplified and more recognizable.

With my brand guidelines ready, I started working on drawing a layout for the new website and implementing it into Figma. I focused on hierarchy of information as well as similarity, proximity, and figure-ground relationships. I used my brand colors and fonts that
worked well with those in the logo. I used photos from the previous website and some free stock photos since the few pictures there are of the inn have a very low resolution.

**Figure 5:** Website home page
My next step was to get an Instagram account up and running. After I set the account up, I linked it to the email, website and address and created a profile picture and bio for the account. Then I generated content using free stock videos and images as well as photos from the original site. I added captions with hashtags to get the attention of relevant accounts and highlighted the Inn’s attractions and accommodations.

Figure 6: Instagram posts

My final step was to create some merchandise for the brand. The owner had specifically requested coasters but I also made a tee shirt and tote design for my project. I used my logos, hand drawn elements, and brand colors to design a set of three coasters for the beverages they eventually plan to serve. I also made a mockup of a shirt and tote, as a touchpoint and souvenir for guests to purchase and take home with them to spread the word about the amazing Inn.
Figure 7: Branded coasters

Figure 8: Tote bag and tee shirt designs

Conclusion

Some parts of my project are easier to implement than others. The logo will be used for the company and hopefully put into the website soon. Since the website was done in Figma and the company uses a certain booking software for their website, I don’t believe they will be implementing my design. However, they do plan to use some of the ideas from my website design in order to make their website true to brand guidelines and easier to use. The Instagram account is up and running and I have had a few conversations with the owner about how to go about it after I finish this project. I think I will continue to post as a part of my project since he
has little experience with social media. He definitely wants to order the coasters but with so much renovation, they are limited on financial resources and probably won’t order any merchandise otherwise.

I think incorporating Gestalt principles in my project made it very successful. With the Inn’s classic branding needing to show up in the new branding, these principles helped me to justify my decisions and create branding that was refreshed but not unrecognizable. I think the creation of brand guidelines altogether will help the Inn in the years to come, so they have something to reference. I think by making the brand look more aligned and creating more intentional design, customers will have more brand trust and loyalty, and bookings will increase in the coming years. With the continuation of the brand updates being implemented on all customer touchpoints, the High Tide Inn will be able to keep their current loyal customers while attracting new ones as well looking for a place to relax and enjoy Maine.

**Reflection**

While I am proud of my completed project, there were definitely a few road bumps and limitations I encountered during my project that I did not predict. The new owner of the Inn was busy with his personal life and the Inn seemed to be more of a side project for him. When I realized that branding was not his biggest priority in terms of time or financial resources, I restructured my project. I knew they didn't have a marketing team to make sure brand guidelines were enforced, nor did the owner understand the importance of these. I made the guidelines as simple as possible as well as explained to the owner the best way to use them.

The priority with the website was to make booking and updating as easy as possible, which meant they had chosen a software that prioritized this, but looked like a template. For this reason I decided to design my own page on Figma rather than try to adjust their current site with
very limited design capabilities. Overall, I think the owner was able to see through my design how incorporating brand guidelines and design principles into a website can make it more usable and attractive and will hopefully encourage him to make these changes in the future.

With updates to the physical inn being costly, merchandise and other brand expenses were put on the backburner. Because of this I tried to do as much as possible with minimal expense. I focused on coaster designs as I knew they would be inexpensive to produce. I still created tee shirt and tote bag designs in case they would be interested in getting these made in the future, but I knew they would not be used for now. I knew Instagram would be an impactful marketing tool with no cost to the company so I focused my efforts into creating an account and content. While I usually don’t prefer social media marketing work, I had the most fun with this because I had the most creative freedom building it from the ground up. The hardest part to work with was the outdated and low quality pictures, but the owner has asked if I could come to Maine and do some photography work for them which would really improve the account.

Overall, I learned so much about branding and working with a client throughout this project. After working on this, I feel confident that I would enjoy a career in branding for small businesses. I also feel strongly that I was able to do this project successfully through the use of Graphic Communication principles and everything I have learned over the past four years of my time at Cal Poly.
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