With or Without a Graphic Symbol

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A brand choice conditioned by the profile of the organization and its communication.

Recently, the government of a South American country dictated that all public organisms — from ministries to institutions of all kinds— must identify themselves by using a logo-symbol of their own, distinct from the rest, followed by their full name. This laudable will for organization is supported, unfortunately, by a widespread and false belief: the conviction that the pair logo-symbol+logotype is the universal model of corporative and institutional identification. This belief is held — even among some designers — despite the overwhelming amount of excellent brands that do not meet this model. The anecdote leads to a consideration on verbal/non verbal polarity in graphic identification and, consequently, the role that typology plays on it.

Among all the typological options, the first alternative, the one that marks the sharpest frontier among the strategies of graphic identification, is the one about adopting a logo-symbol or not, that is, a non verbal sign. Verbal/non verbal is a capital opposition in self identification. And this option is not unmotivated. Besides cases of extreme uncertainty, where the choice may be free (not the most), the option "with or without a logo-symbol" has reasonable grounds. And the source of constraints may be in the profile, in the terms of communication, or in both.

To offer some guidance in the making of a decision about this alternative, the following arguments could be suggested.

When is a symbol needed?

1. When the reading conditions require a more synthetic sign than the name, and the high exposure of the brand in the media make it possible for the memorization and recognition of this logo-symbol by the public (signposting function: FACEBOOK).

2. When the brand has to act as an umbrella brand, for which it has to be necessarily synthetic ("guarantee seal"), and an excessively large logotype prevents it (backup function: P&G by Procter & Gamble).

3. When the hierarchy or lineage of the brand recommends the creation of a pseudo-

heraldic emblem (heraldic function: MERCEDES-BENZ).

4. When the profile of the brand and the register of its communication with its public demand a kind of fetish or mascot to enliven and grace the brand and attract its public (ludic function: Apple).

5. When the nature of the product recommends its annunciation, from the brand, as a medium of enticement for its consumption (motivating function: BURGER KING).

When should a logo-symbol be avoided?

1. When a low level of exposition of the brand makes it impossible for the remembrance and recognition of a logo-symbol and, therefore, this will lack of real identifying life, evidencing itself as superfluous or, even, as noise or interference. Such are the organizations only recognizable by their oral names (MIT).

2. When interest lies on focusing the attention on the name, and avoid all dispersion of identification (EPSON).

3. When the personality of the organization is based on the highest parsimony, austerity, seriousness and absence of all aspiration to emblematize; when a "good name" is enough, that is, when the functions of heraldic, ludic, motivational or backup signs to other brands, are superfluous (SIEMENS).

4. When the profile and function of the organization lack of a concurrent character and its name, verbally installed, makes a logotype sufficient (OTAN).

5. When a brief name can accomplish all the requirements of identification and communication and even fulfill the role of a logo-symbol (IBM).

Obviously, in instances in which the former conditions are not observed, the option, as shown at the beginning, will be free. A much more frequent situation in brands of products than in corporative and institutional brands. In summary: the right solution will depend on the previous analysis of the particular conditions of identification in each case and in the success in perceiving them in order to know what it is needed. Designing is not inventing, but resolving.

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