



**Creating the perfect logo design —
12 essential steps for successfully
managing logo design projects**

Because, although every memorable logo has a great idea at its heart, that's only part of the back story. Have you ever stopped to wonder what triggered that Eureka moment? How many other great designs the client rejected? Or how you could create something that successful yourself?

The path to a perfect logo design is rarely smooth. It takes hard work, bags of confidence and a steely determination. There really isn't a standard template for pulling it off: every single logo project is different, just as every client is different. That said, having a clearly defined, yet highly flexible, process can help you get there. It helps you and the client know what's coming next and means that everyone understands what's expected of them. The following advice is based on many years of experience, working on logo design projects, both good and bad. It's by no means foolproof. But use these steps as your starting point or as a sanity check as you go along, and you'll be on the right track.

You'll know when you've seen one: a super smart logo that jumps off the page and stamps itself firmly in your consciousness. The sort of beautifully designed logo that makes designers wish they'd created it and clients wish they had one like it. A logo that looks brilliantly simple but was anything but simple in its making.



Start with a strategy —

Without a brief and some proper upfront thinking you're always going to be on the back foot. Whether that's a simple one-page design brief or a highly sophisticated, probably expensive, brand strategy, you need a clear purpose. Because without a strong framework to build your brand marks on, they'll crumble and fall down.

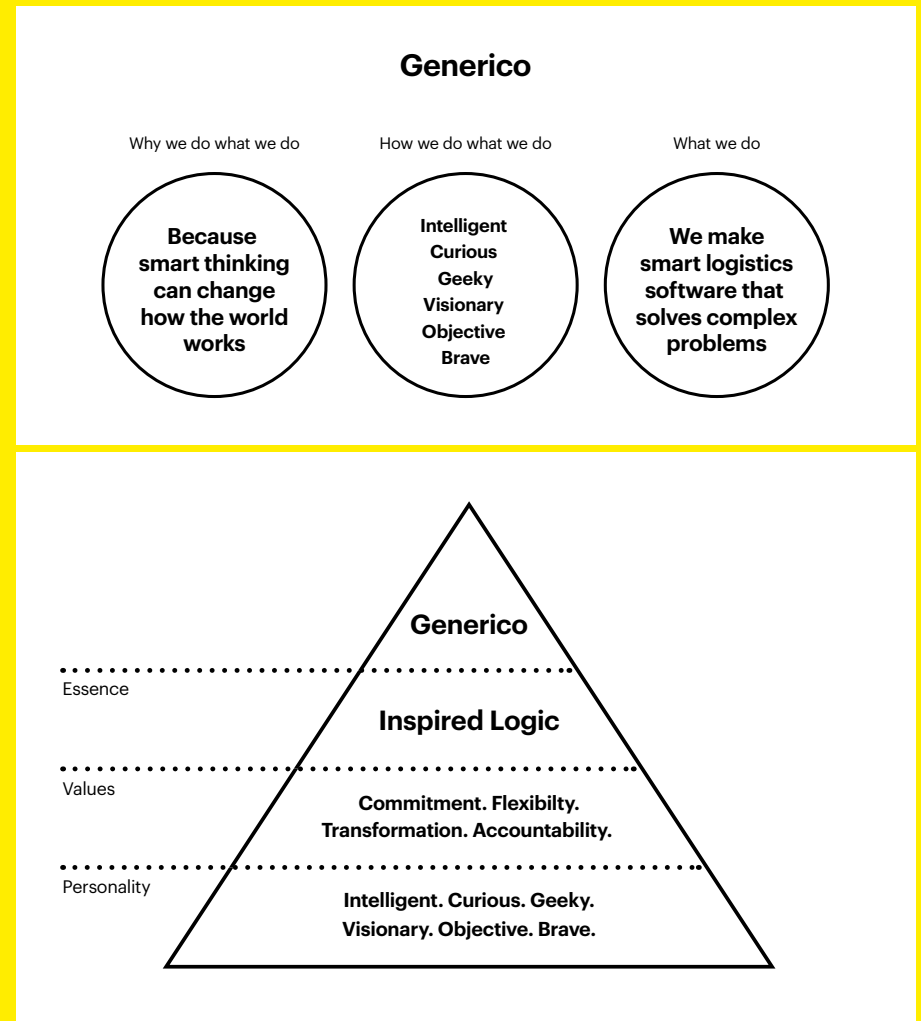
Without some agreed criteria to judge your designs against, it will come down to someone sticking their finger in the air and saying... "I'm not sure why, but I like that one".

If there's a brand strategy report you can get hold of, you're off to a good start. With any luck, this should provide an intriguing

insight into the organisation, its competition, positioning, tone of voice, brand story and essence – tons of great stuff to get your creative teeth stuck into. If such a document doesn't exist, you'll have to do some legwork yourself. Talk to your client (and preferably get more than one person's perspective) about who they are, what they stand for, how they see themselves and how they'd like their customers to see them.

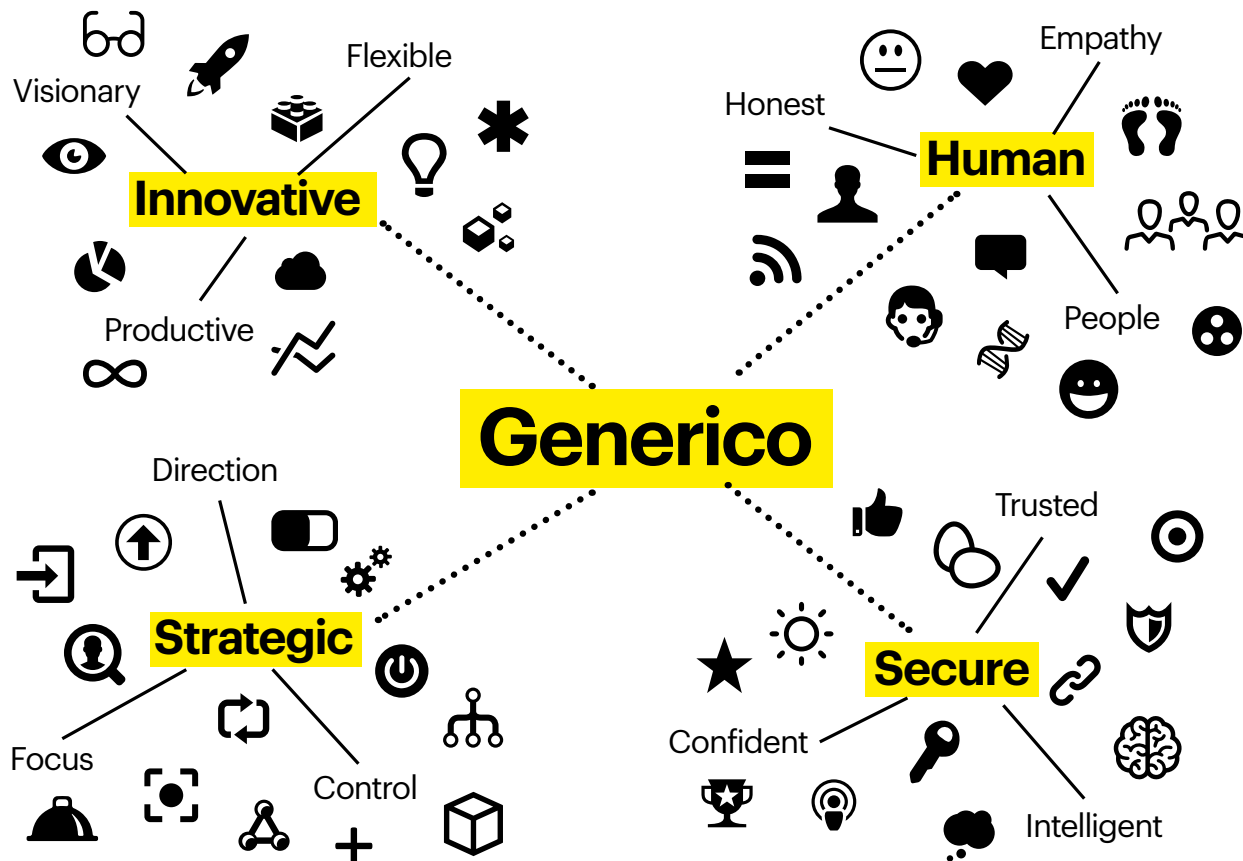
With or without a brand strategy document, it's essential to start with a clear creative brief. Not just a few notes jotted down in the course of a phone call or meeting. But a precise outline of the scope of work, what makes the organisation different and maybe even some early direction on how they can be singled out from the crowd. Write this up yourself based on early conversations with your client, or ask them to write it. In either case, get them to sign it off so that everyone knows where they are and what to expect. Now let's get started, we're working for a company called Generico.

➔ **Brand strategy provides a central idea and blueprint on which great logo marks are built. These are often developed as a collaboration between the client, the strategist and the designer.**





Give it some meaning —



Look at the world's successful brands: in most of their logos you'll find some sort of meaning. Something that represents or expresses their brand idea. Something that shows their personality. Something that conveys what they believe in. Give your designs some meaning and you're off to a flying start.

The best way to achieve this is with a bit of organised creative thinking (if that isn't a contradiction in terms). Start by extracting concepts, ideas and keywords from the brief and clustering them into overarching themes. Map out the clichés, symbols, icons and well-established visual language for each theme. Look for crossovers, scope for development or the potential to create something distinctive.

As mentioned, our fictitious company is called Generico, a forward-thinking business, full of super-smart people who challenge conventional wisdom. It creates intelligent logistics software. It makes complicated problems simple. But Generico has hidden in the shadows for too long. Following some serious investment, it's time for it to take its products to market and become a more commercial beast. This project is all about building a brand from scratch, not re-designing an existing one. It's a brilliant opportunity to express what it's all about. And a great opportunity to flex our creative muscles. How do we make Generico shine?

← **Creating a logo requires insight and intuition. While insight can be achieved through gathering and interpreting information, intuition is more closely aligned to experience and gut feel.**



Consider different types of logo —

→ Logo's come in all shapes and sizes. From wordmarks to image-based marks, there are no hard and fast rules about which approach works best. Experiment, but be sure the ideas fit the brief.

Emblems

Is there a shape or holding device with which the company name is inextricably connected?



Wordmarks

Can the brand personality be conveyed using purely typographic means?

MoMA
SONY
Google

Pictorial marks

Could an immediately recognisable image be simplified or stylised?



Letterforms

Could the company's initial (or initials) create a unique branding device?



Abstract symbols

Can you invent a symbol that conveys the brand's big idea?



A logo in itself is not a brand. The term logo is short for logotype, graphic designer speak for a custom-lettered word. Logos is Greek for word. You can see why the term 'logo' caught on - it's dead catchy. But what people are usually referring to when they say 'logo' is a symbol, emblem, monogram, initials or any form of graphic device that represents a company or its products and services. A logo (or brand mark) is the flag behind which pretty much every organisation stands. And, just like people, they come in all sorts of shapes, sizes and varieties.

In the early part of a project it pays not to limit your thinking to one particular approach. Be adventurous and try them all. What fits? What works? What doesn't? Would this idea work better this way, or that way? Have a go at coming up with ideas for all of the following categories, even if you have a hunch about what the client will go for. Remember that there are no hard-and-fast rules, so explore combinations of categories and crossover between them: sometimes that's where you'll find the best ideas, and clients can make unexpected decisions, so test the water.



Look at the bigger picture —

Before unleashing your creativity on logo ideas, it's a good idea to know where your logo fits into the bigger picture. Get to grips with the brand structure of the company you're working with.

What's the fundamental framework of the organisation? Does it have sub-brands or a portfolio of different products and services? How do these fit together? Is there a master brand, or several separate brands? Should different offerings feel like they are part of the same family? Or distant relatives?

Brand architecture, as it's known, might not sound like the most exciting aspect of logo design, but tackling this now can spare your blushes down the line. And while this structure, along with its associated internal politics, should have been sorted as part of the strategy work, your job as the designer is to make sense of things visually.

Sketching out the brand framework, before jumping on your Mac, is always a good idea. It can really help to make sense of things, and clarify your thinking.

Broadly speaking, the brand architecture of most organisations falls into one of the following categories, or is a hybrid of them.

No brand architecture is exactly the same, and no one architecture is better than another. Each has its own advantages and disadvantages. And nothing is set in stone - it can be appropriate to develop the framework over a period of time, as circumstances dictate. There's an infinite amount of scope for variation within each system, so experiment and don't be afraid to offer up several alternatives to achieve the end goal.

↓ Getting to grips with a company's structure and brand architecture will ensure the logo designs are future-proofed, and bring consistency to a clients portfolio of services, products and communications.

Monolithic

The organisation uses one name and visual identity system across its entire portfolio. For example, Virgin Atlantic, Virgin Media, Virgin Active and Virgin Money.



Endorsed

The organisation owns a variety of brands, each of which is endorsed by the group name. For example, Shredded Wheat by Nestlé, KitKat by Nestlé and Nescafé by Nestlé.



Branded

The organisation owns a number of brands or companies that appear to be unrelated. For example, Vauxhall, Chevrolet, Cadillac and Opel. All General Motors brands.

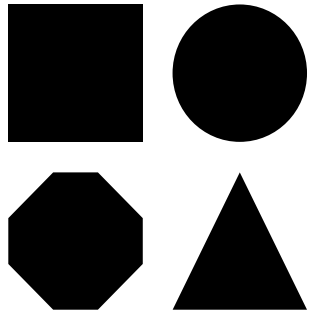


5



How the mind works —

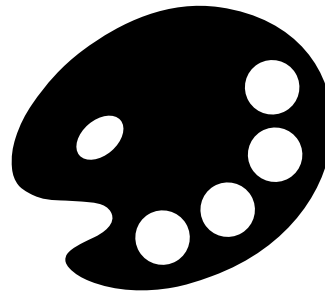
1



Shape

Shapes come first. Reading is not necessary to identify shapes, but identifying shapes is necessary to read. The brain acknowledges distinctive shapes that make a faster imprint on the memory.

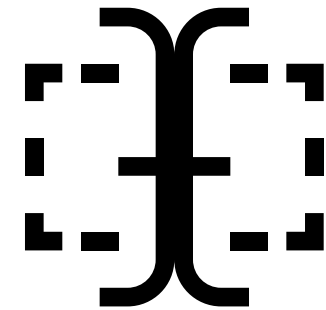
2



Colour

Colours come second in our sequence of cognition. Colour can evoke emotion and trigger its own association with a brand, but needs to be considered carefully. Some companies virtually own a colour.

3



Type

Our brains take more time to process language, which means that content comes third in the sequence behind shape and colour. This becomes particularly relevant if you're working with a complex brand mark.

Research tells us a lot about how the human brain processes sensory information. It's mostly common sense, but worth serious consideration when designing brand marks. For instance, we tend to acknowledge shapes before language, which might be worth bearing in mind if you're creating a logo that needs to compete in a particularly congested sector.

Symbols can become incredibly recognisable through exposure, so much so that some organisations have dropped their name entirely. Nike and Apple are two brilliant examples of this. Of our senses, sight plays the most significant role in our ability to recognise and remember a brand. So it's worth thinking about how the brain will process your logo designs:



Our brains are hardwired to process distinctive shapes before colour and words. Symbols can become so instantly recognisable that organisations are able to drop their name altogether.



Generate lots of ideas —

The beginning of a new project is really exciting: your enthusiasm is at its strongest and the possibilities are infinite. At this time, the more ideas you can come up with, the merrier. But how do you stop things rumbling on forever? Where do you draw the line?

It's important to set yourself clear goals and a proper definitive deadline. For instance, commit to generating 10 type-only word marks in an hour, 20 letterforms in two hours, or as many abstract symbols as you can in a day. Then stick to your goal religiously.

If your ideas hit the buffers and you're struggling for inspiration, ask yourself lots and lots of questions. Could the brand idea be expressed by... exaggerating something? Taking things literally? Saying the opposite? Using double meaning? Using a metaphor? Changing perspective? Comparing the brand to something unrelated?

Use a pen, use a mouse, use whatever medium you work fastest in. Quickly translate your ideas onto the screen or page as soon as you can. These are sketches, and it's about the idea at this stage, so avoid too much fiddling and tweaking. Always stop when you said that you would. Set aside time to properly review everything you've come up with, make a shortlist for development, then move on.

➔ **Concentrate on ideas initially, not the execution, and be sure to know when to stop. Then apply quality control, narrow your focus and work up your preferred logo designs for presentation**





Check out the competition —

 NatWest

HSBC 



The **co-operative** bank



LLOYDS
BANKING
GROUP 

 BARCLAYS


 Santander

 RBS
The Royal Bank of Scotland

It's no good coming up with an absolutely brilliant logo if it's virtually identical to one of your client's closest competitors. Or, worse still, one of the world's biggest and best known brands.

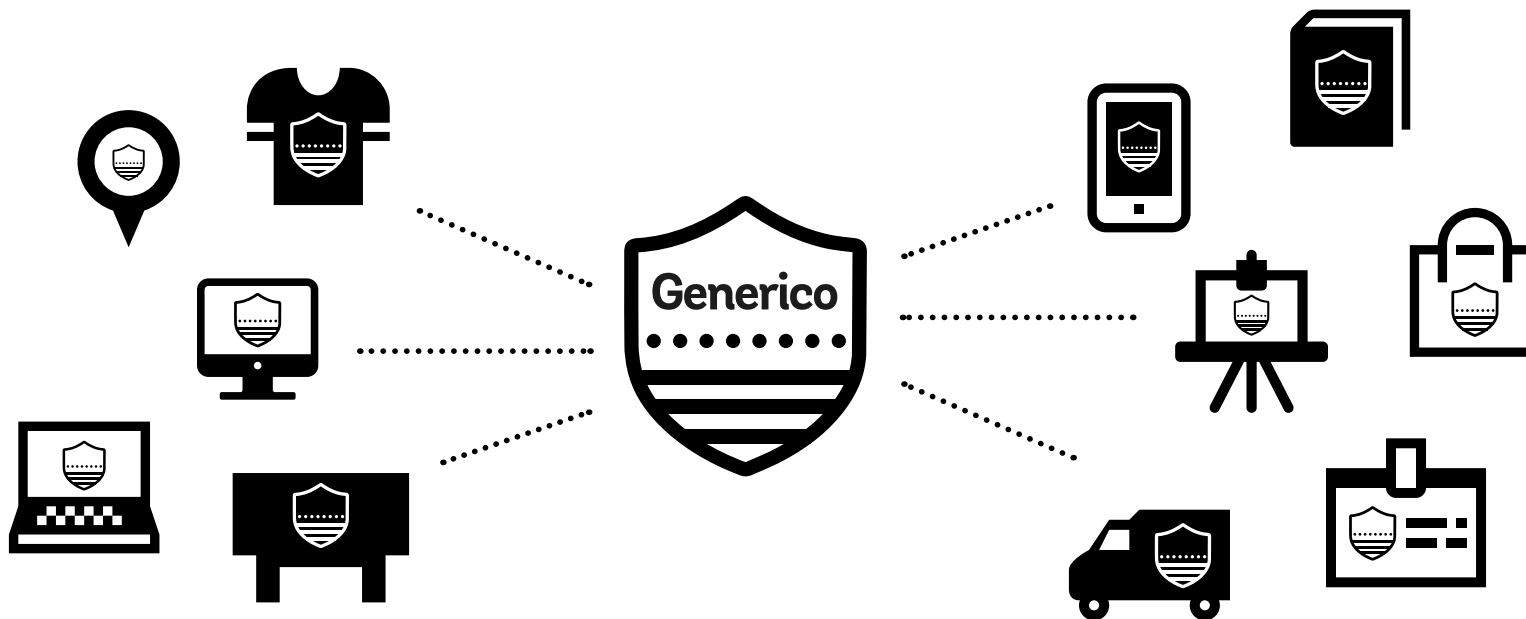
Do your homework. Check out the brand's rivals. Check out the whole sector. What symbols do they use? What fonts do they use? What colours do they use? Know your stuff, do some research, look for opportunities in the marketplace and create your own space.

By all means spend some time hunting the logo blogs and checking out agency websites, but don't copy what's already out there. Be inspired by it. It's great to be aware of what's fashionable in the world of branding, but always aim to present designs that are not only distinctly different from the competition, but simple and timeless.

 **Much of the ground work will have been done during the research and brand strategy stage. But it's still worth doing a final search to ensure your perfect logo isn't going to land you in hot water.**



Stretch your designs to extremes —



↑ Choose a small selection of the most visible applications and see how the front-running designs work on them. Think about potential production issues, and remember to include digital channels, such as social media icons.

Brand marks live in an increasingly complex, multi-channel environment. In layman's terms, this means that how your logo works as an app icon on your smartphone or in your twitter feed is just as important as how it looks on a business card, on the side of a bus or behind the reception desk in your client's office building.

How will this brilliant design of yours work in a tall skinny space? How will it work in a wide shallow space? Does it still work in black and white? Could it be stitched onto a garment? Could it be screen printed on a balloon? Answer questions like these early on in the design process and you can save yourself a world of problems later on.

At this stage of the project, it might also help to create some rough mockups. Brand marks rarely exist in a vacuum and there are tons of resources out there to help you achieve mockups quickly and effectively. Whether you choose to create designs for stationery, signage or social media, mockups can help you and the client visualise and evaluate a logo's potential beyond the design in isolation.



Judge your shortlist properly —

Sometimes gut feel is a great judge of the way to go. But often, one person's gut feel can be another's gut wrench. Finding the way forward can often be tricky.

Clients frequently lack the confidence to make big decisions and as humans we struggle to be objective and get past what we simply like or don't like. You can sometimes find yourself stuck between a rock and a hard place when opinion is divided within a project team.

Aim to filter your client's selections, feedback and development suggestions back through the criteria set out in the creative brief. Always remember what the project is aiming to achieve and focus discussions around that. If in doubt, use a scorecard to help judge designs objectively. Your scorecard should include some of the following questions:

Brand scorecard	Logo A	Logo B	Logo C
Does it support the brand idea?	5	3	2
Is it distinctive and memorable?	3	2	3
Is it different from the competition?	3	1	5
Will it work across different media?	2		
Will it stand the test of time?			
Total			

You might not always choose the winning logo this way but it helps focus minds on the task in hand. This is also a good point to remember that there's way more to branding than just a logo. A brand mark can't do everything on its own. But it can be filled with value by everything from photography and typography to tone of voice and staff behaviours.

➡ **Aid your own decision making through a clearly defined criteria against which the client can also judge your designs. This will avoid design by committee, and ensure the right choices are made.**



Listen to feedback —



Once you've created a shortlist - ideally this should be no more than a few ideas - canvas opinion from as many people as you can.

What does your mum think of it? What does a five-year-old make of your sophisticated designs? Is it easy to read? Does it look friendly? Does it look a bit like a dog? Have they seen anything similar? If there's time, run some workshops, focus groups or an online survey with the target audience. Listen to everything people say, not just what your fellow designers and the client think. You'll probably hear a lot of random stuff that you can disregard, but if lots of people are saying the same thing, no matter how uncomfortable that might be, you need to tackle it.

← **Listen to feedback constructively. Have the confidence to discount personal preference, such as I don't like purple. If a particular issue or concern is raised more than once however, take note.**

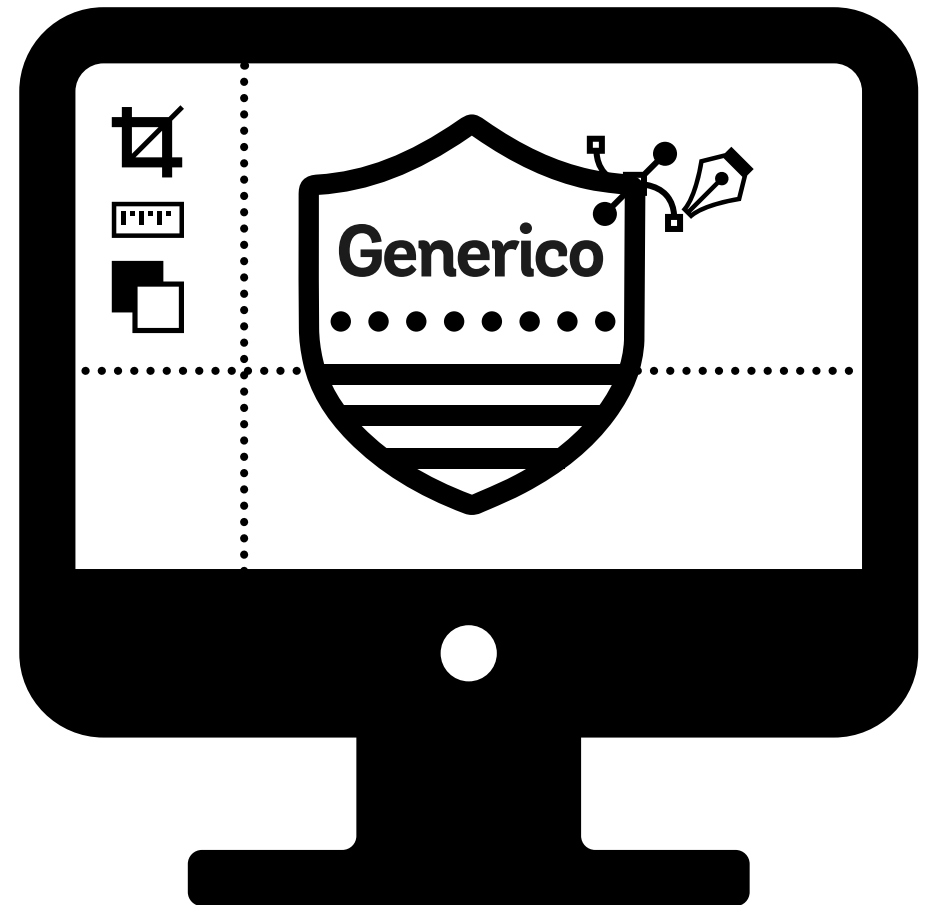


Refine, refine, refine —

Once the final logo design has been selected, it's easy to relax and take your eye off the ball for a moment. But the devil really is in the detail.

Double check that any curves in your brand mark are super smooth. Make sure the spacing between letters is spot on and that each letter is perfectly proportioned to the rest. Double check them again, well before releasing it into the wild. Zoom right in and check for glitches. Print it out really large and stare at it for a bit. Scale it down to 100 pixels and see what happens. You probably won't get another chance to change it once it's gone, so try and get it right first time. Then once you're finished refining, finish. And stop twiddling.

↓ Step back and take a long, hard look at your masterpiece. Ensure it's legible in all colour variants and sizes. Check the spacing between characters and the relationship between the symbol and type.

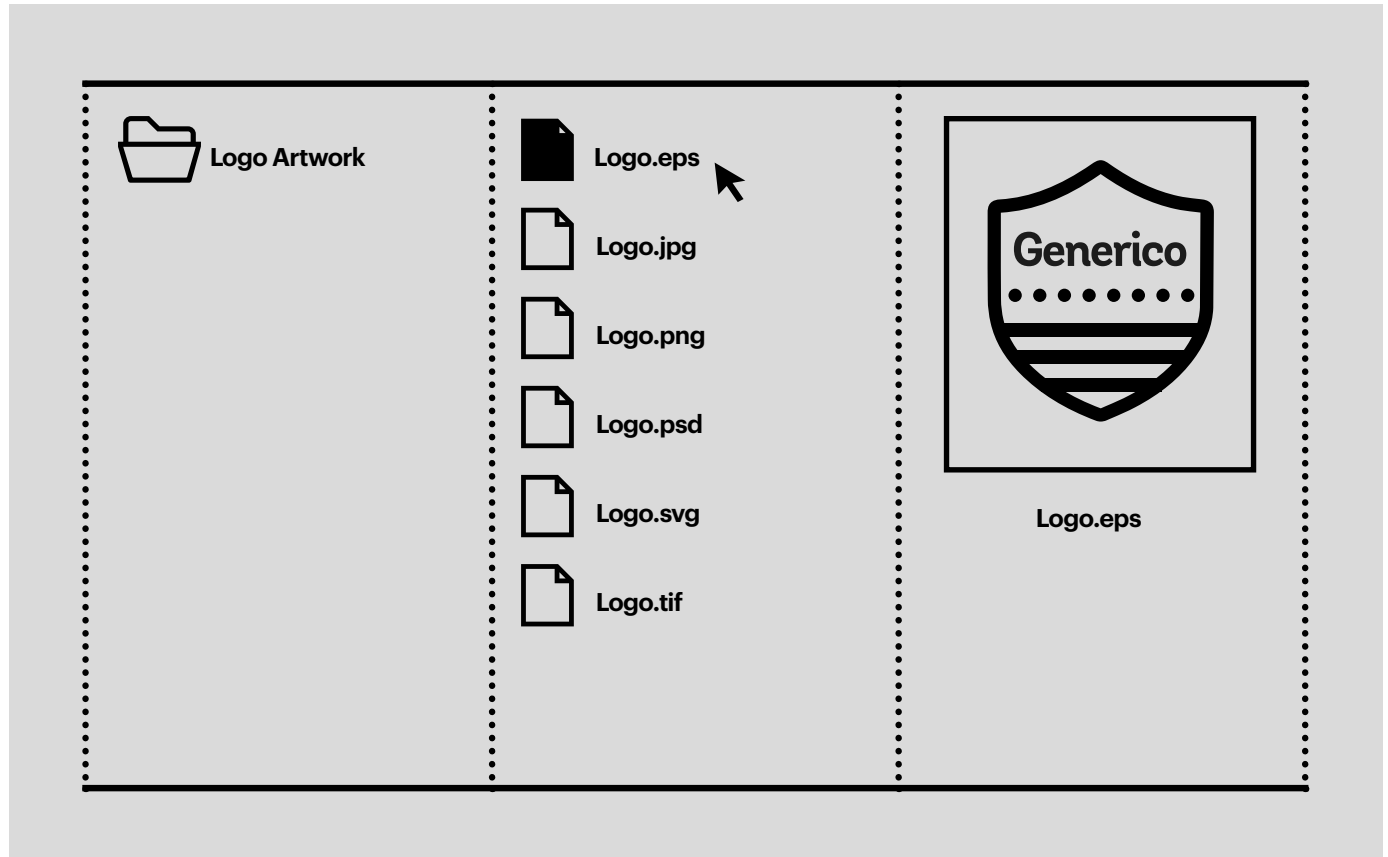




Create robust master artwork

There's nothing worse than seeing your beautiful, slaved over, masterpiece wrongly or badly reproduced. You can help prevent this happening by producing a comprehensive and well organised set of master artworks.

We'll leave detailed brand guideline documents for another day, but a few simple rules and the correct file formats should help prevent mistakes and aid consistent reproduction. Covering all the common graphics file formats - EPS, JPG, CMYK and RGB - will stop the inevitable email requests and make sure users are not left to their own devices.



Create master artwork for every eventual application and channel, from full colour to single colour and from digital to print. Test all file formats before releasing final artwork for implementation.

Conclusion

There's no sure-fire way to produce a brilliant logo - you need to tailor your process to suit the particular project and your own preferred way of working. Some logo designers generate dozens of rough ideas, while others prefer to hone a few ideas and work up more fully developed prototypes for each.

At the end of the day, it's the idea that counts. No amount of sheen will compensate for a lack of fresh, creative thinking, and a simple rough sketch won't stop a great idea shining through.

While following these steps alone won't guarantee sign-off on your favourite idea, this is a pretty robust way of planning your next logo design assignment. It should help you feel more confident about the process and provide the flexibility to suit almost any type of client. It should also help your project stay on track and focus minds on the end goal. Always remember that if all logo design projects were the same, life would be boring. Every one of them is unique, with different aims, aspirations, expectations and budgets.

It's worth repeating that a logotype alone is not a brand. Spotify will still be Spotify with a different logo design. But, along with other key ingredients in the branding mix – language, colour, typography, illustration, photography – logos are a key component of the visual wrapping that makes brands recognisable to the outside world.

Fabrik adds industry to creativity. A hands-on place, where everyone works on the shop floor, we focus on quality and craftsmanship.

Proud of our bias towards making things, rather than talking about things, we welcome visitors to our factory-floor. To arrange a tour, please contact us.

Fabrik Brands –

98 Central Street, London
EC1V 8AJ United Kingdom

+44 (0)20 7336 1388

mail@fabrikbrands.com

www.fabrikbrands.com

