



"American Trademarks" Traces the Origins of Our Logo Lust

By Ken Carbone Thu April 8, 2010

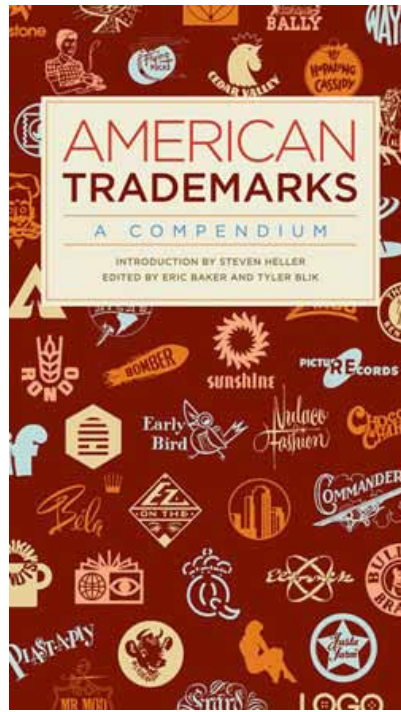


In the year 100,010, some evolved species will be digging through ancient digital rubble and find a strange visual iconography made of tiny colorful squares with rounded corners. They will diligently attempt to decipher what we meant by "I am T-Pain," "Doodle Jump," and "Zombie Farm." Finally, they will conclude that our native tongue was something called Apps.

Every day new apps are introduced for the iPhone, iPod, and now the iPad (not to mention Android apps). Each represents a new business and the touch-screen icons serve as their "logos." With over 100,000 apps to date and more on the way, this is a creative gold rush for graphic designers and fuels our insatiable lust for designing logos.



Logos, symbols, and trademarks present the decisive creative challenge of reducing ideas to their essence. It's like a book jacket or poster, but with the potential for much greater exposure, recognition, and longevity. Evidence of this popularity among graphic designers is the myriad design publications and ever increasing number of Web sites that chronicle logos past and present. And, with Logorama winning the Oscar, the ubiquity of logos (good or bad) even made its debut on the silver screen.



With vast visual resources readily available, do we really need another fat book about logos? Designers Eric Baker and Tyler Blik think we do, and I agree. Their recently published book, American Trademarks: A Compendium, is worth squeezing onto any designer's crowded bookshelf. Baker and Blik are intrepid "archeologists" who have been unearthing symbols and trademarks for decades. Their beautifully designed book showcases the good, bad, and the endearingly goofy.



American Tobacco, when smoking was high class; IBM before they were "Big Blue;" an insecticide company that under-promises and over-delivers

With over 1,000 examples in categories such as animals, circles, faces, or science, it's fun to browse and serves as a curious retrospective of American entrepreneurship.

View Slideshow: 11 Logos You May Not Remember

Philip Johnson famously said, "You cannot not know history." The next time you think you have a new idea history will prove that you don't. However, Eric Baker and Tyler Blik's book can inspire a new generation of designers to see that what was old can be new again.

A great logo won't make a spacecraft fly faster or better. The logo is for the public to love and must communicate the bold ambitions of these important programs. Governments should employ world-class designers to create world-class logos. If not, maybe they should give Hollywood a try. They know how to get people excited about the future.

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Ken Carbone is among America's most respected graphic designers, whose work is renowned for its clarity and intelligence. He has built an international reputation creating outstanding programs for world-class clients, including Tiffany & Co., W.L. Gore, Herman Miller, PBS, Christie's, Nonesuch Records, the W Hotel Group, and The Taubman Company. His clients also include celebrated cultural institutions such as the Musée du Louvre, The Museum of Modern Art, The Pierpont Morgan Library, The Chicago Symphony Orchestra, and the High Museum of Art.

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