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Google Brand Analysis

The widely-utilized search engine and technology company Google has its beginnings in the mid-1990s as the brainchild of two Stanford University students named Larry Page and Sergey Brin. The company is now one of the most easily-recognizable brands in the world. This brand analysis will explore the philosophies of the company, its history, and how those principles factored into the development and evolution of its brand identity and logo.

Google began as a search engine named Backrub in the mid-1990s. Its first office was “a garage in suburban Menlo Park, California, owned by Susan Wojcicki” (“From the Garage to the Googleplex”). Wojcicki would go on to become the current CEO of YouTube, which is a subsidiary of Google. Bright colors were part of Google’s office decor from the beginning, and that aesthetic would carry over into its logo. Page, one of the company’s founders, is often credited for creating the first company logo in the graphics program GIMP in 1997 (“Google Logo and Its History”). The next design, created by Stanford University assistant professor Ruth Kedar (kedardesigns.com/google), became such an integral part of the company’s identity that it was used from 1999 to 2015. Kedar’s design process shows the evolution of her concepts, which include a primary color scheme with an interruption through the use of green (see fig. 1). In 2015, the main brand logo underwent an overhaul that remains in use through the present time. Icons associated with the brand continue to undergo various updates.

The color scheme of the logo has been central to its brand messaging. Each letter of the word “Google” is spelled out in a repeating pattern of the primary colors with one exception. The use of green on the “l” is intended to express the message that the Google brand is cutting edge and breaks from convention (“Google Logo and Its History”). This scheme has remained part of the logo design, even through the 2015 overhaul. In some of the earliest iterations of the logo, an exclamation point was positioned at the end of the word “Google,” which was inferred to be somewhat standard at the time, shadowing the success of Yahoo’s brand and image as the industry leader.

In addition, Google is well-known for the “Google Doodle,” which is a graphic created to replace the traditional logo periodically to highlight various social, historical, or current event items. Some are interactive and take the user through a series of videos, slides, or even games while informing the user of the story behind the design. The first Google Doodle was a basic change to the logo for one day to inform users that the office was attending the Burning Man Festival (see fig. 2). Since that time, Google Doodles have become more intricate and appear more frequently as part of the brand identity.

Ruth Kedar was presented with a formidable challenge when designing the Google logo. “One of the concerns when commissioning a brand design is longevity. How will it fare as the brand evolves through time?” (kedardesigns.com/google). Gerard Huerta, a designer whose work includes creating logos for the band AC/DC and cable television network HBO (gerardhuerta.com/biography), believes that a good logo does not necessarily require updating as the brand evolves if it is done well. His designs have enjoyed longevity and iconic status.



Fig. 1: Images from kedardesigns.com/google. These early Google logo designs were never put into practice, but they show the evolution of the brand identity.

In a YouTube video created by PBS Digital Studios in 2012, Huerta stated, “If a logo has been working and is recognizable and the company has spent millions of dollars to promote it, there’s probably very little reason to redesign that logo” (PBSoffbook).

Despite the logo’s relative youth as compared to a number of Huerta’s designs, Google did choose to make changes. Significant elements of the design Kedar created were, in fact, retained during the 2015 update. In particular, the color scheme remained in the overhaul. However, the logo itself was not the only part of the branding that underwent changes. As the brand expanded beyond search engine capabilities and into other areas of technology, associated icons were also changed. The most notable and dramatic 2015 changes were to the “G” icon, in which the serif, lowercase “g” set against a blue background was changed to an uppercase, sans serif “G” with a color scheme to mirror the search engine logo (see fig. 3). The new uppercase “G” is slightly similar to the original “G” icon used in the late 1990s through the late 2000s.

As Google revamped its logo in 2015, not everyone in the public was convinced that it was a positive decision. One critical opinion written by blogger and typography professor Gerry Leonidas asserts that the redesign abandons the typography of the original design, “going for a style that loses all but the most crude formal qualities for differentiation” (“All trousers, no legs”). Columnist Alexandra Petri wrote an unfavorable opinion in *The Washington Post* which drew comparisons between the new typeface and Comic Sans (“Opinion: Google’s new look”). Some, like design critic Steven Heller, expressed a favorable perspective in an interview with *Wired* shortly after the redesign. “For the first time in years, I feel good about a redesign of a corporate logo” (Rhodes, “Google’s Logo Is Trying”).

Heller, however, was more critical of the media coverage of the changes in not only Google’s logo, but other brands in recent history. “I had to craft at least three different ways to say the simple answer: I like it...” (“Logos Start Media Frenzy!!”). His critiques were geared not only towards the redesign itself, but presented a greater commentary on the media and societal expectations and perceptions of the changes. The 2015 redesign was also compounded by additional logo changes due to Google announcing its position under its newly-created holding company, Alphabet, within the same month. Heller was approached by multiple mainstream media reporters for comments on the new branding efforts, leading him to question the shift in what was once the type of news shared primarily in the trade magazines. Furthermore, Heller stated that “what used to be a comment on a blog or message board is now a reasoned opinion” (“Logos Start Media Frenzy!!”).

In terms of design, the trained eye will notice significant changes in the typography of the main search engine logo. The serif font was abandoned for a sans serif font choice. The color scheme, however, remained the same (see fig. 4).

When looking at the new logo through the lens of various basic principles of design, there are several points to consider. The principle of contrast is evident in a number of ways, from the interrupting green color of the “l” to the retention of the slanted angle in the lowercase “e” from the previous design. The angle of the bar on the “e” would almost seem to go against the principle of alignment, but it is a recognizable brand trait, and



Fig. 2: Top image from google.com and bottom image from searchenginewatch.com. Google Doodles have evolved over the company’s history from the first “Burning Man Festival” image (top) and are synonymous with the overall brand image.



Fig. 3: Google icons from iconlibrary.com. The Google icons underwent noticeable changes during the rebranding in 2015. The updated icon on the right follows the color scheme of the search engine logo.

the letters are otherwise in straight alignment with one another.

Close proximity is obvious; the letters are part of the name and, therefore, are related and part of the logo design. “Google” can be easily determined to be one word. The kerning appears to be somewhat of an improvement in the 2015 version, particularly between the “o” and “o.” In Kedar’s earliest renderings of potential logos, she experimented with offsetting the second “o” and even merging the two together at times. In the end, the decision to keep them separate while using the color palette to express some of the quirker, more playful elements relative to the company has kept the logo looking more professional.

The designers had to consider how the logo would appear across different devices. This likely played heavily into the development of the current iteration. The logo had to be clear and easy to read on mobile devices, and the retention of the bright colors was an effective decision in that regard.

If the company was looking to create a more sleek, modernized version of the logo in order to keep up with what appear to be industry standards, they have succeeded in a few ways and fallen short in others. The typeface choice almost has a look of amateur, childish handwriting. If Google was looking to represent themselves as a modern, sophisticated technology giant, other existing sans serif fonts might have been more appropriate to the task, such as Futura. A slightly thinner weight to the typeface might also have helped retain some of the more polished elements of the previous design and rendered a more subtle change. Instead, Google created their own custom geometric sans serif font which they named Product Sans (“Evolving the Google Identity”). Retaining the color scheme has kept the brand identity solidly recognizable to everyday users, however, and the icons are tied to that scheme through the application of the principle of repetition. The colors are in use repetitively across the spectrum of icons.

Ultimately, the brand changes generated a great deal of discussion among the general public when they were implemented, but the publicity gradually waned as web users resumed normal habits and grew accustomed to the new look. Industry insiders and designers will likely continue to study and debate the rebranding. The public, however, might only take notice if further changes are made in a more dramatic fashion.

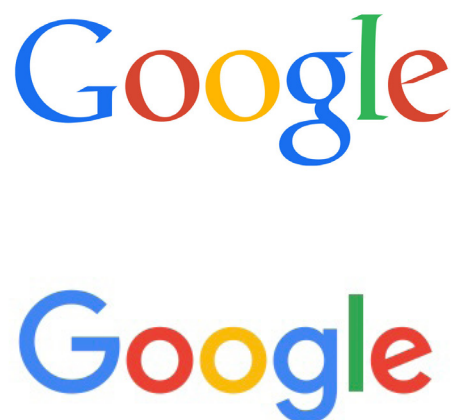


Fig. 4: Top image of Google logo from blog.hubspot.com. Bottom image of 2015 updated Google logo from logomyway.com. The changes between the Kedar design (top), in use from 1999-2015, and the revamp (bottom) are evident when compared.

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