

Pro logo

Useful tips to help you refresh, not reinvent, your brand

BY ANN MEREDITH BROWN

What's in a name?" asked William Shakespeare's Juliet. When it comes to designing magazine names—a lot. Here's some expert advice to help you spruce up your logo without compromising brand recognition.

Look back in time

By examining your magazine's past, says designer Tom Brown of Port Moody, B.C., its history will help influence your new design. "[Do] extensive research on the typefaces you propose to work with. This will give you an understanding of how to use the fonts."

International type designer Jim Parkinson also likes to look at a logo's history before he begins. The Oakland, Calif.-based typographer has created and redesigned logos for dozens of newspapers and magazines including *National Post*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *Newsweek*, *Rolling Stone*, *Men's Journal* and *Esquire*. "A magazine that has been around for a while has a lot of time and money invested in establishing its identity. There is no reason to chuck all that out the window... There are often little clues, details, attitudes in the old logos that are very appealing. I like to try to move the logo forward without severing all links to the past. A design that evolves continues to capitalize on the identity that has been established. It also says, 'We are continuing to try and make our publication better.'"

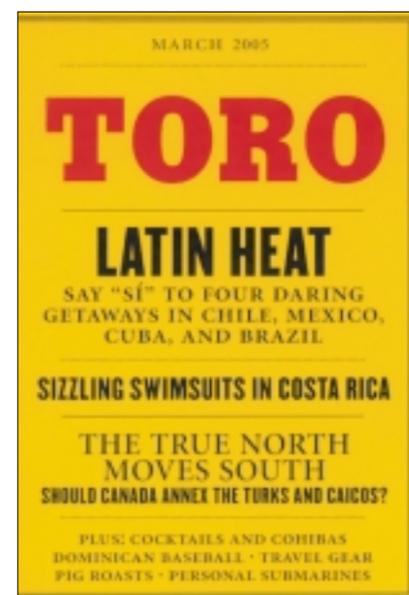
When Parkinson redesigned *Esquire's* logo with Roger Black and Ann Pomeroy in 1991, he revisited its classic logo of the 1960s, which according to Parkinson had gained weight in the '70s and '80s to become "a grotesque blob." Their solution was to take *Esquire's* original, light, informal, script logo of the late '30s and add weight to it until it was similar in weight and shape to that of its '60s predecessor.

New York magazine did its homework for its recent redesign. "As with many elements of our redesign, it is not a radical invention so much as a restoration of a classic form. When you have a magazine with the history ours has, great solutions can be plucked out of the archives," wrote the editors of *New York's* November 22, 2004 issue. Its new logo is based on editor Clay Felker and art director Milton Glaser's 1968 version, redrawn by typographer Ed Benguiat and blown up so that it bleeds off the page.

Simply put, *Toronto Life* art director Carol Moskot says, "It's better to riff on yourself than on other people. Best to look like who you are or



The evolution of *Toronto Life*. Note the resemblance in type design for *Life* in 1989 and 2005. "It's better to riff on yourself than on other people," says *Toronto Life* art director Carol Moskot.



Leanne Shapton was inspired by liquor bottle labels and bullfighting posters when designing earlier concepts of this logo.



Esquire's logo circa May 1969 (top) had evolved into "a grotesque blob" by the 1980s. Its 1991 revision was jazzed up with an inline, shadow and kink with the s overlapping the q for its Dubious Achievements issue, February 2004 (bottom)

who you've looked like rather than looking like somebody else."

Think outside the box

Leanne Shapton, former art director of the weekly *Saturday Night*, who is now based in Spain, drew inspiration from various sources when conceptualizing the logo for men's magazine *Toro*. "Thinking of *Toro*, the bull, led to Hemingway, led to a certain idea of masculinity, led to liquor labels and the old *National Geographic* yellow all-text covers. I looked at bullfighting posters and scotch labels for the idea of the listing of stories and the size..."

Another purely playful intention was to invoke that liquor bottle feeling of a sticker or label that was just sort of slapped on the cover and wrapped around the spine." Shapton suggests looking in unconventional places for design inspiration. "Don't just look at design or get bogged down in design history or type. Look at paintings, art, fashion, automotive design, prescriptions, instruction booklets."

But don't design out of a box

With thousands of different typefaces to choose from, it's tempting to just buy an out-of-the-box font, type in your logo and move on. However, typographer Rod McDonald, of Lake Echo, N.S., cautions against this. "Typefaces by nature have to be generic; the type designer never knows what two characters are going to come together. But once you know exactly what the characters are in a word, then you can customize it so that they fit perfectly."

But beware, says Vancouver-based OP Publishing creative director Anna Belluz. She feels too much meddling with type looks amateurish. Her biggest pet peeve is digitally distorted logos that have been manipulated in Illustrator. "You can work with it in Illustrator if you understand that you're not simply expanding or condensing those shapes. [Otherwise] it's not true to the letter form as it was originally designed."

Hire a typographer

Toronto Life recently underwent a major logo revamp. Its two-tiered nameplate was taken out of its red box to reach across the page on one single line. Art director Moskot hired typographers Parkinson and McDonald to help with the logo, an evolution of Ken Rodmell's 1970s adaptation. She's often asked why she doesn't save the

money and set logos herself. Typographers are relatively inexpensive (about the cost of a professional photo shoot) and are worth every penny, she says. "I haven't spent 40 years studying how letterforms work about balance, about shape. The most minute changes can make a huge difference to the weight of your logo."

Brown of Tom Brown Art + Design agrees. He advises against designers drawing logos unless they're trained typographers or proficient at handling type. "Setting and designing a logotype is a different skill than simply being good at pushing type around in a magazine feature design."

And while you're in the spirit of asking for help, look to your editorial department for advice. "Don't underestimate the opinions of the editorial staff over opinions of the art staff," says Shapton. Moskot agrees. She has even looked to newsstand staff for input. When investigating the success of past magazine covers for former redesigns, Moskot asked for newsstand sales numbers as a way of discerning what logos were popular by how well the issues sold.

Just like the city, *New York* magazine's logo has grown so much it now runs off the page; a modern version of the classic

Keep it simple

The KISS method seems obvious and has been ingrained in designers since high-school art class and yet it's often ignored. Need proof? Take a look at the newsstands. So know your limitations, says Toronto-based designer Jim Ireland of James Ireland Design Inc. "Don't use an obscure, unreadable font. There are other places in the magazine to be adventurous." But do be recognizably unique, says Brown. He suggests using elements and qualities within the magazine's overall design to (re)create a logo that represents the true nature of the magazine.

Typographer McDonald, creator of the *Maclean's* body font, feels a major redesign every five to six years is unnecessary if the logo is constantly being modified. He adheres to the Betty Crocker model. Although you might not have noticed, Betty Crocker's face and hairdo have changed numerous times over the years to stay current, says McDonald. "The only time you actually notice it is if you put them all together and [realize] there have been major changes made over the years. But the look and feel remains constant. And I think that's a good model for magazines." M

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