

# Image Branding

## The Graphic Challenge in Presenting a Clear, Consistent Visual Message for Your Ministry

By Phil Mondy

Corporate logos like the McDonald's arches and the Nike Swoosh are instantly recognizable by millions of people worldwide. These carefully crafted and widely disseminated logos have played a powerful role in making the brands they represent so well known and successful.

Logos can play an important role in consumers' perception of an organization, and can strongly influence their buying behavior and brand loyalty. And even though few ministries enjoy McDonald's vast advertising budget, strong visual branding is just as important to Christian ministries as it is in the mainstream marketplace.

Compassion International knows how important a good logo can be. A few years ago, the ministry invested significant time and resources in developing a new logo and in creating the detailed graphic standards that will preserve the logo's power and purity. Chuck McGinty, Compassion's international communications director, guided the entire process. And he offers the following four principles for ministries struggling to present their message in clear and compelling ways.

■ **Research Your Audience.** Compassion started work on its new logo by conducting research in two areas, internally and externally. Outsiders thought it was focused on short-term disaster relief, as opposed to helping children in poverty through long-term development programs.

Insiders had a better idea about the purpose of Compassion, but still had many different ways to communicate it. The research Compassion conducted was a vital and revealing process for developing its logo.

Research also revealed that those outside of the organization did not know Compassion was a Christ-centered ministry. As an organization based on Christ with strong evangelical Christian

values, this became a critical missing component in the organization's identity. For this reason, the logo needed to contain more than just the name "Compassion."

Within the organization, the challenge was to develop a consistent presentation of Compassion's ministry focus. Those who worked closely with the ministry, including volunteers, needed to be able to believe in the ministry and provide consistent communication to outsiders.

In creation of the new logo, McGinty wanted people to know that Compassion's main goal is releasing children from poverty. So he sought to create an identity for Compassion

### Symptoms of a Weak Logo

1. Slightly different logos on every publication
2. Unreadable logos on different color backgrounds
3. Different taglines on different publications
4. Colored backgrounds detracting from the logo

### Results of a Weak Logo

1. Confusion among the audience
2. Failure to establish the organization visually
3. Unprofessional appearance
4. Incorrect conclusions by the audience

through the logo that could "persuade outsiders to buy in and insiders to believe."

■ **Clarify Your Identity.** After discovering a bit more about its audience, Compassion knew it must have a message that correctly communicates who it is. So a team started to create

a solid list of words to describe Compassion. Creating a statement that summarized its entire organization wasn't an easy task, but it was a worthwhile one.

One of the important ways McGinty clarified organizational identity was simplifying its goals as an organization. He wanted to make the message to the audience as easy to understand as possible. With nearly 3,000 projects around the world, there could have been hundreds of very interesting definitions of Compassion's work, but it settled on two attributes that were central to its mission: 1) Compassion is a Christian organization, and 2) Compassion helps children in poverty.

These two ideas are leveraged in the logo through the addition of the tagline, "Releasing children from poverty in Jesus' name." McGinty wanted Compassion to have that Christian identity in a way that wouldn't alienate anyone by using the word "Christian," so "in Jesus' name" was chosen.

### ■ Preserve Your Graphic Integrity.

One of the major problems McGinty noted about Compassion's identity was a schizophrenic appearance it had with some of its audience. Before Compassion implemented the new logo, there were more than 10 different logos being used by various country offices around the world, making one organization look like many different ones. Some outsiders actually thought these different logos represented completely different organizations.



The Compassion logo with English tagline.

Compassion now has a strict set of graphic standards that must be followed by all Compassion personnel and designers around the world. Before the guidelines were imposed, Compassion's logo

suffered unintended alterations, which were a large cause of the multiple personality perceptions. Now, even in other lan-



The Compassion logo as it appears in other languages.

guages, the logo remains exactly the same with a translated tagline.

Compassion's logo is broken into four distinct parts, each with its own significance:

The leaping child emphasizes that Compassion is focused on children in poverty of all ages.

The tagline communicates concisely what the organization does in one statement.

The word Compassion is central to the logo, saving the graphic from unneeded ambiguity.

The color of the logo is specifically designed to enhance the message of Compassion.

"The logo isn't just the leaping child or the word Compassion or the tagline; it's all of them together. We want people to be able to look at the logo and see what we do. We want it to have the same look and feel, no matter who sees it or where they operate," said McGinty.

Another reason McGinty sees importance in the clarity of the message is the development of the Internet. "As the Internet has grown," he explains, "it has become increasingly important to have the same look and feel everywhere the organization is represented."

■ **Prioritize Your Message.** Sometimes organizations want their logos to stand out and be distinctive in a world saturated by images. McGinty says that while distinctiveness is important, it should not compromise the clarity of the message. The leaping child shown in Compassion's logo was a graphic created for clear communication and was chosen despite being a less distinctive icon.

McGinty believes that prioritizing the message of the ministry in some cases requires the sacrifice of a more unique symbol. He said, "The leaping

## How to Maintain Logo Integrity

Maintaining a logo's graphic integrity is crucial to any organization's marketing and communications. Consistency and clarity in a logo are often compromised over the course of time, significantly weakening a ministry's image. Few organizations take this aspect of their marketing seriously, when it's a cornerstone to their branding efforts.

Here are a few examples prohibited from Compassion's graphic standards that other ministries should consider avoiding as well.

**1. Major changes to proportions of the logo.** In this instance, a forbidden use of Compassion's logo would be magnifying the size of the leaping child. While this logo is not unattractive, it's a drastic change to the image, and weakens its branding power.

**2. Changing the location of the tagline.** Again, the issue is not the attractiveness of the logo but consistency. The tagline was broken up in a specific way for Compassion, and changing it weakens the image.

**3. Using a different background without the correct version of the logo.** This makes it difficult to read the logo and can cause the organization to look unprofessional.

These are only three of 12 examples for prohibited Compassion images, and this is only a small part of its graphic standards document. Though these may seem like petty details, they add up to major mistakes for graphic integrity. These specific criteria can be the difference between a confusing, unprofessional brand image and a strong, effective one. Every ministry should consider having graphic standards, thereby refusing to compromise the integrity of its logo.



**AOL Running Man Logo**



**Peace Child Logo**



**Compassion Leaping Child Graphic**

child isn't necessarily a unique symbol, but it communicates clearly what we want it to communicate, and that's most important to us."

### **Conclusion**

McGinty believes that following these four principles helped Compassion create a powerful graphic image. Focusing on these principles will help other ministries improve the visual impact of their ministry literature and products, no mat-

ter how much or how little money they have to spend on the process.

Compassion's re-branding initiative was time-consuming and costly, but McGinty says that investing in a consistent global logo is something any ministry can benefit from. A smaller ministry will see a greater impact from its advertising if it employs a clear and well-defined logo according to the principles outlined above.

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