

## Is Branding Just for Large Accounting Firms?

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What is branding, really? It is often misunderstood and associated with huge dollar investments - or it is thought to be simply redesigning a firm's logo or meant for only large accounting firms. None of this is correct.

Brand development is a strategy that can be used by CPA firms of all sizes because it can accomplish many important objectives simultaneously, such as:

- increase a firm's visibility in the marketplace;
- differentiate a firm from its competitors;
- deliver more consistent messages to clients, contacts, and staff;
- focus a firm's marketing program;
- enhance recruiting and retention efforts; and
- integrate marketing and communications after a merger.

Branding is not just the use of a name, term, logomark, or design to identify a product or service, but it is also the development of a personal relationship between the client and the product or service. Your brand name conveys a set of expectations and associations and conjures up the personality of your firm. Simply put, it is who people think you are, from the way a person answers the phone, to the way you do business, to the look of the invoice.

Positioning drives branding strategy. A market position is a promise between your firm and the client. For example, what comes to mind when you think of Volvo? For most people, it is "safety." Volvo's early brand positioning focused on keeping drivers safe from accidents with safety-glass windshields and steel cages. Safety at Volvo now works in new ways. Preventative safety helps us avoid accidents in the first place. They have also addressed increasing concerns about crime with their personal safety initiatives: building features into the car that help make you safe as you enter and exit your car.

So, what's your position? The CPA brand is often associated with attributes including integrity, competence and objectivity. Marketing research commissioned by the AICPA supports these attributes. But since these attributes are inherent in all CPA firms, the key to successful brand development for your firm is to determine its unique characteristics, personality, and culture. Think about your particular set of values, programs, culture, assets/skills, or the people who deliver a service. Then determine a unique position.

### **Five Elements of a Consistent Brand**

1. **Logo.** Your logo is possibly the most important element of a brand identity. It is usually the most recognizable element of a branding system, since it is typically used in all materials. A rectangular-shaped logo is ideal. In one glance people should know who you are and what you do.

Do not make too many variations of your logo. This will weaken your identity. Create a logo library that includes a color version, black and white version, square logo (for social media) with and without your tagline.

2. **Tagline.** A tagline is a slogan or a short set of words used to associate with your firm or brand, conveying the most important attribute or benefit that you wish to communicate. A tagline should support your positioning and be short, simple, and clear. A tagline that raises questions is not effective.

3. **Colors.** In order for your brand's colors to become associated with your firm, it is important that the same colors are used throughout all materials. By selecting Pantones (and their corresponding RGB/CMYK colors), and enforcing their usage, you ensure that the colors used in all of your firm's print and digital pieces remain consistent.

4. **Fonts.** Similar to colors, it is important to select specific fonts that should be used throughout your firm's materials. Limit this selection to as few fonts as possible. Additionally, it is important to select a corresponding web-safe font to use if your firm fonts are not already web-safe. Choose fonts that reflect your firm's image and mesh well with your logo and other style elements.

5. **Imagery: Illustrative and/or Photographic Style.** Select one imagery style, illustrations or photography. All imagery should have a consistent look and feel, whether printed or online.

### **Conclusion**

Building your accounting firm's brand is an investment of time and dollars. However, your new brand and positioning can increase your firm's visibility; differentiate it from competitors; deliver more consistent messages; focus your marketing program; enhance recruiting and retention efforts; and, integrate marketing and communications after a merger.

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