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IP Thesis Paper

"Re-branding Corporate Identity"

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With sincere thanks to:

When McDonald's suffered its first-ever month of financial loss in 2003, it hired Larry Light as its Global Chief Marketing Officer to provide a change in the direction of its image. In a lecture at the University of Pennsylvania in 2005, Light informed the students, "Over 60 percent of our most frequent customers said they would rather eat somewhere other than McDonald's." This negative statistic prompted Light to change McDonald's corporate mission by "reinventing, restoring and rebuilding the brand." He enlisted Boxer Creative, a design agency based in Birmingham, UK, to help him. Via a change in the color scheme, font choice and images on the company's printing collateral ranging from placemats to billboards, McDonald's succeeded in sending a fresh, healthy message to its consumers. This positive change was also reflected in the company's annual profits. (The Daily Pennsylvanian)

For my IP, I worked on solving similar branding problems faced on a smaller scale by five Michigan-based Indian companies. They sought to improve their images in the eyes of their primary target audience - Michigan residents of Indian descent. Apart from the basic stationery like logos, business cards and letterheads, I produced publicity materials specific to each company; for example, menus and coasters for the restaurant NeeHee's, discount coupons and promotional material for Lotus Bank, appointment cards and information magnets for Infectious Disease Center, information brochures for the Henna tattoo parlor called Mehendi Art, and receipt books for the Indo-Western clothing store, Bombay Boutique. The process of redefining each of these companies also inspired me to establish an identity for my own company, Jinita Shah Inc. - a design agency that I hope to start in the future.

My first foray into this branch of Graphic Design came during the course of my study in New Zealand in Winter 2008, where I re-branded the identity of a local charity based in Auckland called the Auckland City Mission. I enjoyed talking with the founder and learning about the history of the charity's development as well as his goals for its future. From a designer's point of view, the process of asking the right questions and transforming the essence of the answers into visual images that conveyed the founder's aspirations was a fascinating challenge. Doing this in the form of corporate stationery and meeting the challenge satisfactorily gave me immense gratification. I wanted to do more of it, and the prospect of spending my senior year helping more companies progress by correlating their visions with their identities, and learning about the different facets of Graphic Design in the process, was very inviting.

With that general idea in mind, I next faced the question of which companies to work with in order to inject a more personal note into a seemingly commercial project. I was born and brought up in Bombay, India, and I migrated to Michigan about five years ago with my family. Having this Indian upbringing but living in the United States put me in a unique position as a designer. I understand both cultures and can merge ideas from both, facilitating the communication between an Indian-owned company and its clientele, comprised of Indians as well as non-Indians. Following this decision, I had to choose the types and number of companies to work with. Wanting to show my abilities with creative

diversity, to take my technical skills with the Adobe software to the next level, and at the same time to have a project that would keep me busy for a year, I chose five companies from very different fields: a restaurant, a bank, a doctor's clinic, a Henna tattoo parlor, and a clothing store. I now had a variety of companies to work with and therefore greater challenges to tackle.

As the project evolved, I realized that the journey became more important than the end results, having learned more from the process than the actual products I made. I started off by preparing a list of questions for the founders that ranged from their five-year plans to reasons for their current stationery, and their budgets for marketing. Based on their answers, I looked at the identity systems of other similar companies to recognize trends and differences. I then designed logos that were unique to the companies I was working with. To make sure the clients felt like a part of the decision-making process, I designed five logos for each one and explained my logic behind them, letting the owners choose the one they liked the best. I learned how to sell my ideas by tactfully convincing the clients to choose the logo that I thought worked best. From there, I went on to redesign their existent stationery, and introduce new material where I felt it was needed. I met with the clients every fortnight to update them on my progress and get their feedback, to make sure my designs were sending out the message they wanted.

I also learned the importance of going back to the drawing board if I realized that a logo wasn't working. For example, Infectious Disease Center is the largest outpatient infusion clinic in Michigan. Its mission is to provide quality healthcare, individualized for each patient. When I asked the owner what he wanted his patients to think about when they heard or saw "IDC," he said he wanted his clinic to be perceived as a professional but welcoming and reassuring place. Their logo at the time failed to meet either of these criteria. It could easily have been mistaken for a bank or a legal firm given its corporate blue color and non-distinctive typeface. I went through many of David Carter's logo design books to find out which identity systems worked and why for clinics like my client's. Out of the five samples I designed, both of us liked the same one (See fig. on top). I made the business cards, letterhead, envelope and memo pad using this logo before my IP review in December 2008, and got my client's approval on all of them. At the review my professors thought I had designed an identity for a mortgage company instead of a clinic! The image of a roof over the letters "IDC" was a major factor in making it look like a logo for a real estate company.

So I went back to my list of questions and looked for key words that defined IDC. I decided to focus on the meaning and representation of "virus" and "cure," because these two words made up the reason for the existence of IDC. It took a lot of sketches and many frustrating days until I came up with an image that wasn't so intimidating as to scare people away. At the same time, however, it reflected the seriousness of their reason for visiting the clinic and reassured them that they would get better. I kept thinking about what one of my professors at A&D, Vince Castagnacci, said in his class that became my mantra after this incident: "Don't do it only once; do it until you get it, and recognize it when you do."

As mentioned above, Infectious Disease Center, P.C. was a challenge to work with. The typeface was a major concern for the owner in the original logo; he wanted something that was more integrated with the symbol. The all-caps text of the title, justified on both sides, was hard to read. The transition from my previous rendition of the logo for IDC to the one I ended up using for all the stationery was not smooth; it took a lot of brainstorming and re-thinking of basic goals. I do feel I achieved a much better result, though. The circles in the letters "IDC" are a simplified rendering of viruses. The effervescent nature of the circles represents the progression from being sick to getting cured. The maroon and deep purple colors simultaneously give the clinic a serious and reassuring feel, while moving away from the repetitive and ambiguous message given by blue and white. The other stationery I produced for this company includes letterheads, business cards, envelopes, memo pads, appointment cards, info brochures, information magnets, fax sheets and information pamphlets. This company is considering using my designs for their stationery.

With that, I will now give a brief introduction to each of the other four companies I worked on. Bombay Boutique is now an Indo-Western clothing store located in Farmington Hills, MI. Originally a store for traditional Indian clothing only, they wanted to introduce a new line that appealed to the fashion sense of the second-generation Indian-Americans in Michigan. Bright colors are integral to Indian clothing for weddings
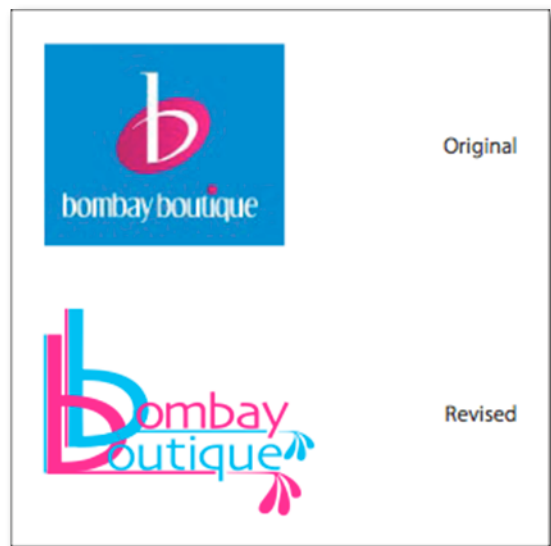
and other special occasions, so I retained the bright blue and pink combination from the original logo. The interweaving of the two "B"s represents the marriage of the Indian and American cultures that appeals to the lifestyle of the target audience. The original typeface was a little too cluttered, making the name of the store hard to read when printed in smaller sizes. So I continued with the sans serif font, but chose a typeface that was more spread out, making it clean, legible and attractive. The other stationery I produced for this company includes letterheads, business cards, envelopes, memo pads, receipt books and fax sheets.

Lotus Bank is a community bank established a few years ago in Novi, MI. Their primary target audience is made up of the Indians and Asians living in the vicinity. The lotus flower is a symbol of trust and purity in the Southeast Asian cultures, hence its direct use for the name as well as symbol of the bank. My aim was to stay away from the regular color combinations of red-white, green-white or blue used commonly in banks. Since this was a bank for a specific audience, I used colors that resonate better for these communities. My version of the logo is a simplified lotus. The name of the bank is located at the base of the symbol, alluding to the fact that trust and culture are the fundamentals that the growth and development of a bank are based on. The typeface is further integrated with the symbol of the logo because of its placement and color. The other stationery I produced for this company includes letterheads, business cards, envelops, memo pads, information cards, information brochures, discount coupon and fax sheets.
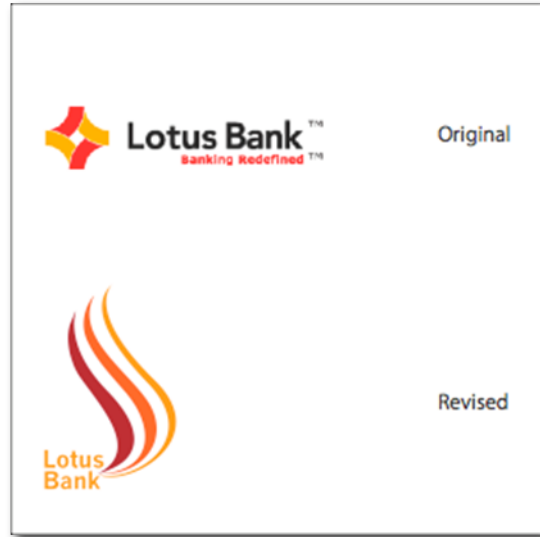
"Mehendi" means Henna in Hindi. Mehendi Art is the name of the Henna parlor owned by Ekta Kansara. Henna is a tree commonly found in India. The leaves of this tree are dried and ground into a very fine powder, which are then mixed with water and eucalyptus oil to make the paste used to draw the designs. Henna stains vary from orange to dark brown, depending on the body heat of the person it is applied to. Kansara's designs are very dynamic, and capture the happiness that surrounds a bride. I wanted to reflect that quality in her logo, and accentuate the cultural and artistic look
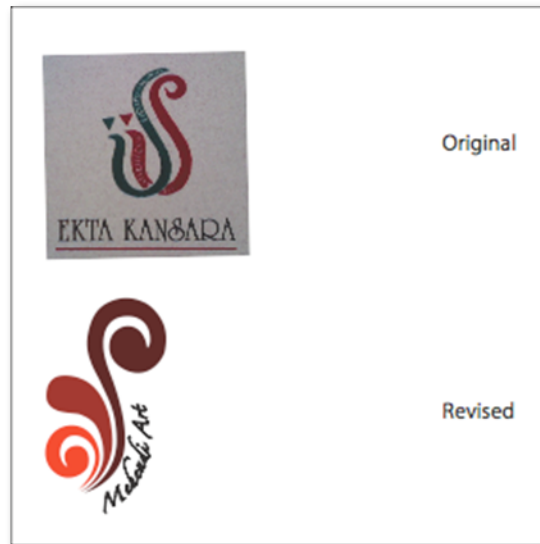
of her Henna designs. The original logo emphasized her name, but I chose to draw attention to the name of her company, because she and her primary audience are located in the United States. Since a lot of her clientele is also made up of non-Indians, I felt it necessary to highlight the fact that Henna is an art within the logo. I chose a vibrant typeface that blended with the active form of the symbol. The other stationery I produced for this company includes letterheads, business cards, envelops, memo pads, information brochures and fax sheets. This company is also considering using my designs in the future.

Suraj (meaning "the Sun") Foods used to be an Indian grocery store based in Farmington Hills, MI. They started a small restaurant within the store itself, which instantly became popular. The owners then decided to get rid of the grocery store entirely and establish a full-fledged restaurant. Their cuisine was essentially made up of Indian vegetarian street food, the atmosphere of which they wanted to be reflected in the ambience of their restaurant. I chose to go with the colors of the four main Indian spices used in street food, which also gave the logo a warm, casual and welcoming feel as opposed to something you would find in a formal, sit-down restaurant. The arrangement of the four blocks of color represents a plate. The categories of food are color-coded in the menu (according to the logo), and will be served in similarly colored plates so that the owners can keep track of the popularity of dishes. This company is going to use my stationery in their prototype restaurant starting in November 2009 in Canton, Michigan. The outlined font used in their original logo was hard to read on lighter surfaces and smaller type sizes. The font I used adds to the casual look, and is easy to reproduce on large wall menus as well as the small labels on coupons or carry out bags. Black and white both stand out in contrast against the warm colors of the symbol, which make the name of the restaurant easily readable even at a distance. The other stationery I produced for this restaurant includes business cards, letterheads, envelopes, memo pads, take-out menus, in-house menus, labels and large wall menus.

Designing identities for these companies made me think about the necessity of having an identity for myself as an artist. I went through the same process while coming up with a logo for my own company. My background of being an Indian, experience as a professional Henna artist and aspirations of becoming a Graphic Designer were the main ideas I wanted to put forth in my design. The orange shape forms the
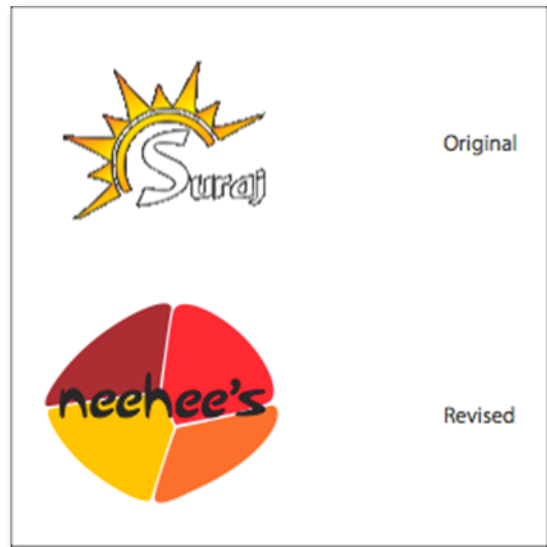
letters "Ji", the first syllable of my first name, in my native language, Gujarati. Even though not everyone can understand the meaning of the form, it still makes for an interesting and vibrant visual symbol. The allusion to a winking, smiling face invites the viewer to think about a happy personality behind the logo, thus creating a positive first impression. I chose a bright orange color for the symbol because it suits the joyful persona of the form.
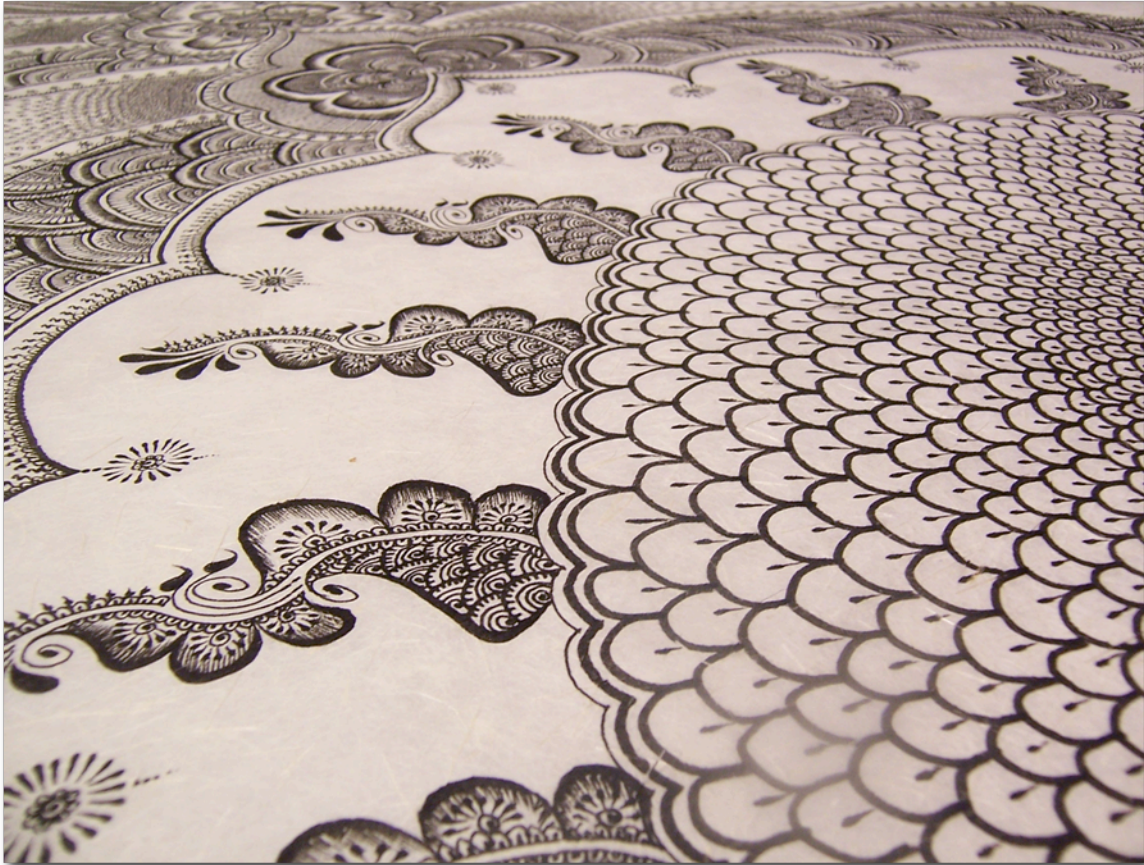
The patience to keep working till I arrived at the best possible solution to a problem came from my experience of being a professional Henna tattooing artist for the last seven years. I have been learning the art of drawing Henna designs since I was ten years old. It is my comfort zone, something I can do without putting conscious thought or effort into. It takes an enormous amount of persistence to draw an intricate Henna pattern, whether on paper or on the human body (see the design above). It also needs to be perfect because when done on the body it leaves a stain that will last for two weeks. Over the years I have developed that perfection in my Henna drawings, and I believe that quality has translated into my design work. Throughout my project, whenever I got bored of sitting in front of the computer, or faced a design problem to which I could not find an answer, I took a pen and paper and started drawing Henna patterns. It was almost therapeutic - my hands worked on the patterns while my mind subconsciously kept thinking about the problem I faced. More often than not I came up with a general idea of

an approach that would solve my problem after I was done with the Henna. The style of complex but clean, almost fractal-like designs showed in my logos, especially in the one I designed for myself.

Milton Glaser said at a *Gain* conference that he despised the word *branding* because it reminded him of "*burn*ing things into animals". The word "brand" has traditionally evoked negative images in the minds of designers. It reminds them of a rampant commercialization of their lives and creative individualities. According to Marty Neumeier, author of The Brand Gap, however, we just need to "establish a level playing field by agreeing on a common language, so that brand-builders from every discipline can collaborate as equals." (Aiga.org) I believe that brands are only as good as the value they deliver. A good brand with a bad company is not believable, and neither is a good company with a bad brand. "Brand" also equates with "trust". Building trust requires constant effort; building a brand, or a corporate identity, requires a solid base and extensive marketing. A successful company rolls forward with the changing times, which makes re-branding very important in terms of adapting to audiences with varying viewpoints.

The process was not easy and solutions did not come at the first attempt. I kept going back to the drawing board based on feedback from the Graphic Designers at A&D as well as my clients to make sure I developed the best possible answers to the various design problems I faced. I'd like to think that I became wiser and smarter about design than I was before I began, which was my aim in the first place. I want to delve further into the field of re-branding after I graduate, and this project gave me the opportunity to strengthen my basics in order to be able to advance to the next level. Designers have the capability and responsibility of bringing about a change in people's outlook towards the products the customers associate themselves with – much like the example of McDonald's in the introduction. With an increasingly global culture, there is a great demand for multi-lingual people who can produce designs that communicate to audiences across the globe. I believe I can fit in that niche and make a difference, and do so more readily as a result of having chosen to do this particular IP project.

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