INSIDE OUT – CI AND CD

Every company, every organisation has a visual image. Intentional or unintentional, good or bad, carefully or carelessly done. What's certain is that that image projects something about the sender. Whether they want it to or not. *By Florian Adler (Adler & Schmidt Berlin).*

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The outside is a reflection of the inside«, said Otl Aicher, one of Germany's foremost designers of visual identities. But this statement is not always properly understood. In many companies – not just the smaller ones – corporate design is regarded as a matter that is guided first and foremost by the personal taste of the managing directors and the board (or their wives). Strategically the corporate design is seen as secondary and treated correspondingly: decisions about it are taken in the same way as decisions about office furniture and fittings. Not surprisingly the results then reflect this.

We designers are of course not entirely blameless in this, promoting our activity as we do as somewhere between zeitgeist/lifestyle and an artisan aesthetic that is pleasing – or sometimes not – but in any case is never culpable. Advertising agencies, on the other hand, argue from the marketing perspective: only that which tempts the consumer to buy is considered successful. Design as a »beauty treatment« or a sales promotion tool?

DESIGN IS ALL ABOUT THE VISUALISATION OF CONTENT

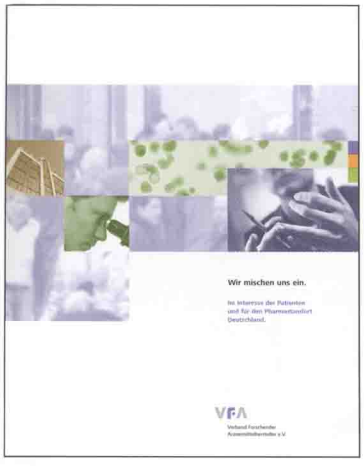
Content only becomes visible through form. Thoughts take on form and thereby become manifest. It's about making a mark or showing the flag. When something is to be taken seriously, it has to be expressed in »black and white«. Often only then is it clear just what it's about: »nailing one's colours to the mast«. The external form is therefore every bit as important as the interior it represents; in the end it's a single whole. Of course you can use form to hide and to lie, as you can also do with pictures or words. But the true task of design is to visualise these factual contents in a proper way. The word »in-formation« expresses this wonderfully.

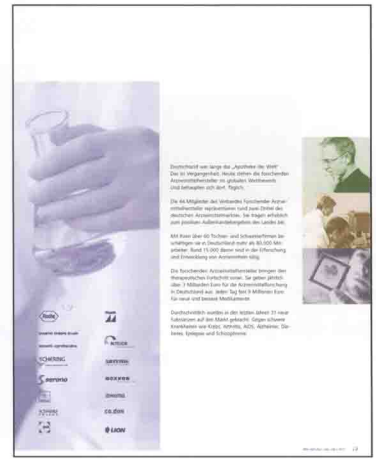
CORPORATE DESIGN AS A PROCESS

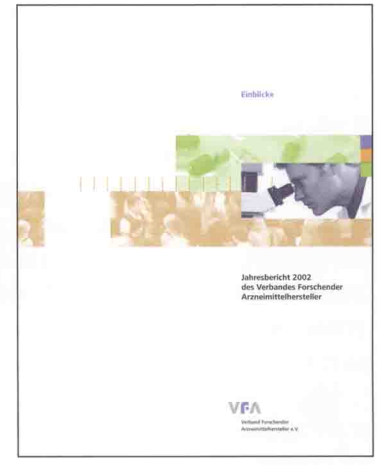
Corporate design reflects the identity of an organisation or company. This design encompasses all visible elements, from business cards to architecture. But the design in the end represents only the visual aspect as it is perceived from the outside. In their book on corporate identity Birkigt Stadler and Funck explain the term as a pithy blend of words, deeds and the appearance of a company with the way that company sees itself. For every design process, therefore, it is essential to understand and agree on this self-

Am Beispiel des Verbandes Forschender Arzneimittelherstellers, der Adler & Schmidt mit der Überarbeitung seines Corporate Designs beauftragte, ist der Entwicklungsprozess vom alten zum neuen Zeichen abgebildet. Die angestrebte Tonalität »glaubwürdig, seriös, informativ und innovativ« war nur durch eine grundlegende Überarbeitung der Marke und des CDs möglich. Beibehalten wurden die Hausfarben, ergänzt durch ein umfangreiches Spektrum von Mischfarben, die auch in der Bildsprache zu einem eigenständigen Auftritt führen.

Adler & Schmidt were asked to revamp the corporate design of an association of pharmaceuticals manufacturers that are involved in research (VFA). The process of developing the new symbol from the old is illustrated here. The resulting had to be »credible, serious, informative and innovative«, something that could only be achieved by completely reworking the brand and the CD. The association's colours were retained, but supplemented by an extensive spectrum of mixed colours, which lend a distinctive identity, also in the imagery.







image, on the goals and specific values of the organisation. We first have to get closer to this »corporate personality«, to collect information, ask questions and listen. Sometimes problems come to light in this process that a designer cannot resolve. In such cases, but also for the handling of the CI process itself, it is advisable to bring in other specialists, such as from the fields of economics, sociology, psychology and other areas of corporate consultancy.

The basis for the development of a corporate design is identifying the self-image and the way the company wishes to be perceived from outside. A significant convergence between these two is essential for a credible and value-oriented corporate image. Extolling the company's virtues can then be left to others. Formulating key concepts that achieve this harmony gives client and designer a joint basis for evaluating the design proposals, free of any personal preferences. A consistent corporate design can thus emerge that carefully deploys its messages to position and raise the profile of the company in its environment, and to strengthen the identity within the company.

RE-DESIGN

Today, however, it's more often a case of re-designing existing corporate identities than designing brand new ones. Companies that are already established on the market would like to make the development processes visible from the outside, do justice to changed positions or adapt existing visual elements to new requirements of design or technology. Here, generally, an awareness of continuity in the change process plays a big part: change as much as is necessary and as little as possible.

WHAT IS GOOD?

Of course the final result must also satisfy aesthetic criteria – it has to look good. But what is »good«? Are we back to a question of taste? Certainly it is possible to set out quality criteria for brand visuals – they have to be memorable, concentrated down to the essentials, and usable in a range of circumstances. They should be surprisingly simple, or simply surprising. But in all cases they must convey the desired impression (see above). Once these criteria are fulfilled, the question of taste becomes irrelevant. The concept of »aesthetics«, incidentally, comes from the Greek »aisthetikós«, meaning »perceptible by the senses«. Beauty is both a prerequisite and a consequence of this.