

## Significance of grid-based design in building strong corporate brand identities

Dr. Kamlesh Vyas

Asst. Professor, Faculty of Fine Arts, Rajasthan University, Jaipur

E-mail: kvyas09@gmail.com

### Abstract

For a long time, the use of grid-based methods has been an essential part of the process of graphic design. Grids serve as a basic framework for the logical arrangement of visual components, typefaces, and visuals. While the company's brand identity may not be the first thing that comes to someone's mind when they hear about a powerful art piece, the brand identity in companies is a big deal. A logo is the brand's face. It is the first thing that we see, and it remains in our minds long after we have gone past the building or off the website.

This study investigates how logo design built on grids can contribute to corporate branding initiatives. It also gives considerable attention to three primary types of grid families, which are square and modular grids, the circular and radial grids, as well as the use of proportional systems such as the golden ratio. To explain the importance and practical implications of the grid system in branding, a great emphasis is put on the aspects of alignment, optical balance, and typographic integration. These have become the core design values that were discussed in the major theoretical works of Josef Müller-Brockmann and Timothy Samara.

The geometries, which are inherent in the grid systems, have here been used as a common vocabulary for ten brand logos, whose respective grid construction drawings were taken as the basis for the case studies. Based on the brand's strategy, the link between the grid and the brand is established such as that the grid serves the brand strategy and vice versa, like for example a grid would be used to support the need for the message to be clear and to the point if the brand strategy be that of a public service institution. It is shown that the use of geometry in the logo design assures the communication of the brand qualities such as ease of understanding, being memorable, and flexibility when the media changes from print to digital. By using grids for the visuals, designers not only get a regular pattern that they can keep using but also a sort of language, thanks to which different designs may convey the same idea and still look very different. The study thus demonstrates through multiple examples that the grid may be considered as a constraint that does not allow the freedom of expression to go wild but rather as an order that restrains the madness of the variations in terms of proportions and rhythms so that they become a mode of communication capable of transmitting complex stories with remarkable simplicity.

**Keywords:** Grid systems; logo design; corporate identity; golden ratio; modular grid; visual hierarchy; typography; brand consistency

**Unit 1: Theoretical foundations of grid-based identity design**

What are grid systems and why they are used One can say that a grid system is a kind of architectural planning which is a skeleton that holds everything together. The grid gives certain possibilities to designers, but in the end it depends on their decision and how they have practiced, i.e. it is such a tool which just makes the work easier by offering potential solutions but at the same time requires human judgment and practice<sup>i</sup>. It was in the mid-20th century when the Swiss graphic designers developed these grid systems, which then became revised and accepted generally as the global standard for the structuring of elements in a print and/or digital medium.

Timothy Samara recognizes the basic/fundamental shapes as grids, which are utilized particularly in graphic design, and more specifically, in layout and identity systems that require coherence between different media. He identifies several different types of grids, such as column, modular, and compound ones, but no matter which one it is, the grid is always a kind of invisible skeleton that controls the proportions, spacing, and alignment. In branding, this constant framework makes it possible for logos and wordmarks to be placed regularly on packaging, signage, and digital interfaces, thus facilitating quick and easy recognition even when the contexts change.

**Three main types of design grids used for logos**

Square or modular grids first of all divide the surface into the same units thus giving the possibility to use the angles, the widths of the vertical parts of the letters, and the negative areas which are following the pattern on the same fixed rhythm. A great advantage of these grids is that they provide a setting for the arrangement of rectilinear and also mono linear marks to look harmonious. Circular grids in logo design circles with the similar diameters actually prefigure the perimeter, the middle, and the shape and frequently use ratios linked to the golden section to obtain a harmonious proportion<sup>ii</sup>.

Logos that are based on proportion systems create an association between the width, the height, and the curvature in such a manner that these associations feel balanced by themselves. It is quite frequent that several systems are applied simultaneously, a square base grid is used for the overall dimensions and a circular grid to create the interior curves like in the design of the Apple and Twitter logos. With the use of a circular grid on top of a square grid, a logo can gain structure and smoothness, which can be very advantageous when the logo has to represent the idea of motion or the character of the product without losing its clearness.

**Grids rules as design values**

As per Josef Müller-Brockmann grid system rules not only help to specify margins, gutter widths, alignment zones, and rhythm but also can be considered a reproducible method rather than a one-time decision. Current practice is well illustrated by Samara who further develops this concept by depicting how axes, baselines, and spatial modules that remain unchanged give and also define designers a shared set of relationships that can be used over and over within the identity and to the identity touchpoints. Among the main functions of the grid are the following: to align the significant figures and the typographic elements to the same

verticals and horizontals, keep the stroke widths constant with respect to the grid modules, and be mindful of the free space zones around the logo so that the logo can scantily be read at various scales .

| Grid type                        | Geometric principle                                                                      | Typical brand message                             | Example logos from this study                                                                                                                    |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Square / modular grid            | Field divided into equal squares or rectangles; consistent vertical and horizontal axes. | Stability, clarity, rational organization.        | PBS head symbol on rectilinear grid; Microsoft Office ribbon icon structured in vertical modules.                                                |
| Circle-based grid                | Intersecting circles of related radii shape curves, counters, and silhouett              | Approachability, friendliness, organic precision. | Twitter bird built from overlapping circles; Pepsi globe using circular arcs.                                                                    |
| Golden-ratio / proportional grid | Widths, heights, and radii follow golden ratio or other proportional                     | Harmony, timelessness, premium positioning.       | Apple symbol using concentric circles tied to proportional series; Santander flame combining diagonal grid and proportional curves. <sup>1</sup> |
| Radial / fan grid                | Lines radiate from a central point or arc, often combined with circular boundaries.      | Energy, broadcast, or expansion.                  | NBC peacock feathers on fan grid; Shell logo's rays emerging from circular base.                                                                 |
| Triangular / diagonal grid       | Equilateral triangles or diagonals organize shapes and intersections.                    | Dynamism, engineering, precision.                 | Mitsubishi three-diamond mark on equilateral triangle grid; Adidas trefoil leaves intersecting on diagonal and circular guides.                  |

These three simple rules from above become brand values because as a matter of fact, viewers perceive the alignment and proportion as signs of order, reliability, and professionalism, even though they are unaware of the underlying grid. On the other hand, a choice of non-aligned shapes or a variation of proportions here and there can make the "noise" of the layout to be visual thus lowering the quality. This in turn hinders the ability of people to very quickly recall a mark or logo. The examples to be discussed below reveal that most of the time, the brands with the well-established corporate logos are not the result of the random sketching of the designer but rather they are those which have been taken step by step demonstrated how the grid-based design can enhance the strategic fit of the brand voice to the visual appearance thus turning the optical balance into a social voice.

## Unit 2: Grids, visualization, and typography in corporate branding

### Visual hierarchy and perception

Grids are valuable tools for designers to regulate hierarchy by creating zones where dominance, secondary and supporting elements can be figured out in a predictable way. The hierarchy in a logo could be used to set the main symbol apart from a secondary wordmark, or to separate an emblem from enclosing shapes or background fields. Frequent positioning of the components in the different uses of the mark educates the audience to "read" the mark quickly, so recognition becomes almost automatic over time<sup>iii</sup>.

Our brain chemistry is such that we are quick to notice alignment and repetition, therefore, elements placed according to a grid usually look less disturbing and more familiar than those with randomly spaced elements. Relations based on the golden ratio and concentric circles refer to our inborn likes for proportion and symmetry, which is why a number of high-tech and premium brands use such concepts to express refinement and innovation. Consistent, grid-driven design of a brand's visual identity across different media, from business cards to app icons, also makes the user journey easier as users don't need to reinterpret the mark every time they encounter it in a new context.

### **Typography and the logo grid**

While the two images illustrate only the construction of a symbol, it should be noted that corporate identities usually go beyond the simple pictorial logo marks and also include typographic wordmarks or taglines. Samara explains that a grid aligns the imagery and type through aligning baselines, cap heights, and x-heights to common bands, thus unifying even different typefaces. Likewise, Müller-Brockmann treats type as an architectural element and therefore advises that designers use grid lines to set the width of text blocks, the length of lines, and the spacing of lines so that the words appear to be combined with the symbols rather than just being placed next to them.

In a real-life scenario, a logo grid is often used to define:

- The capital letters' height relative to the primary vertical dimension of the symbol.
- The clear-space around a wordmark, which is generally derived from one grid unit or the width of a significant letter.
- The alignment of taglines or explanatory text with the edges of the symbol or wordmark, thus maintaining optical balance.

One of the reasons that this close relationship between geometry and typography works so well is that it can be very helpful for co-branded applications, localized versions, or sub-brand lockups - all of which still look like siblings from the same visual family. When grid lines are ignored by designers, they usually do so in a very reflective manner, e.g., a tagline which goes a bit off the grid in order to add a sharp moment, while the main mark stays structurally strong and stable.

### **Grid types and brand functions**

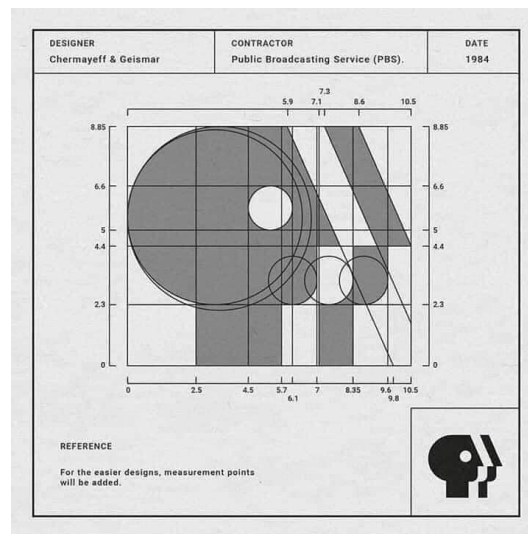
The enumerated table below gives an account of the different grid types and how they correspond to brand intentions along with examples of well-known logos. The examples were derived from the combination of design literature and contemporary analyses of logo grids<sup>iv</sup>.

## Grid types and brand examples

By selecting a grid type that corresponds to the brand's personality the designer not only introduces a visual structure but also aligns it with strategic messaging opening up the possibility for the geometry to "say" reliability, innovation, or openness before the words are read.

### Unit 3: Ten visual case studies based on the attached grids

In each case study below the construction drawings given are interpreted as expounding on how grids can structure brands and build up their individual identities. The logo grid that corresponds to the author's visual analysis appears before the text of each case study.



#### Case Study 1: PBS (Public Broadcasting Service) Logo, 1984

**Designer:** Chermayeff & Geismar.

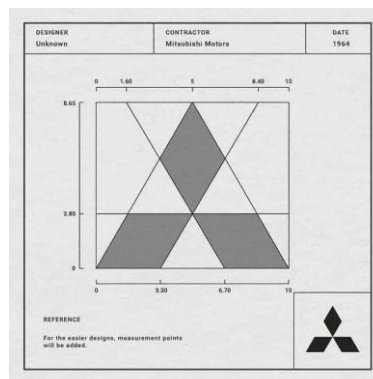
**Colours:** Originally black/white; later adapted to PBS blue (#1D439B) and white.

**Concept:** Represents the very Different people and their perspectives come together through the public media. Using modular square grid, the designers have created repetitive profile shapes that together stand for "common people" seen from different sides, the core idea of PBS - serving the community with content that is accessible to everyone.

The grid's numeric coordinates allow the facial features in the different profiles to align perfectly, thus achieving rhythm through harmony rather than confusion. Besides, the structured pattern is also scalable for TV idents and print and evokes geometrical neutrality thus trust<sup>v</sup>.

Figure 1

## Case Study 2: Mitsubishi Motors Logo, 1964



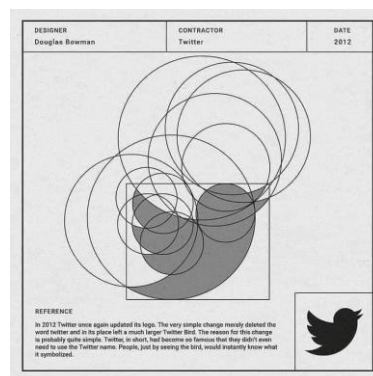
**Designer:** Unknown (internal team)

**Colours:** Red (three diamonds) on white; metallic silver for vehicles.

**Concept:** The Three diamonds are a taken from the founder's family crest, they stand for reliability, quality, and enterprise in automotive engineering. The equilateral triangle grid which sets identical angles is at the basis of the auto manufacturer's precision of mechanical engineering, a heritage of Japanese manufacturing.

At 60-degree points, the triangles join to form a perfect hexagon of symmetry which is the kind of balance that works well not only on vehicle grilles but on all sorts of documents as well. With the grid in place, the variation has been eliminated and Mitsubishi's promise has therefore been rendered in the most literal way - consistent performance is the essence of the brand.

## Case Study 3: Twitter (now X) Bird Logo, 2012



**Designer:** Douglas Bowman

**Colours:** Blue (#1DA1F2); grayscale variants

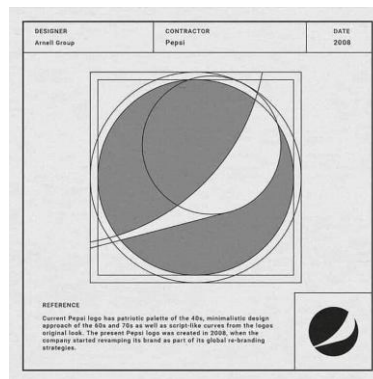
**Concept:** The bird is used as a metaphor for freedom, speed and ease of communication in real-time. Circles overlapping one another in different positions and with different sizes were used to trace the bird's natural hold which also allowed the redesign to be bigger than the one before. The concentric outlines determine wings and tail flowing organically, and yet the grid ensures that the shapes don't get distorted when the icon is viewed at the smallest app sizes.

Figure 3



This goes a long way in supporting Twitter's desire to have a symbol that can be understood globally and one that is very handy to mobile users<sup>vi</sup>.

#### Case Study 4: Pepsi Logo (Globe Redesign), 2008



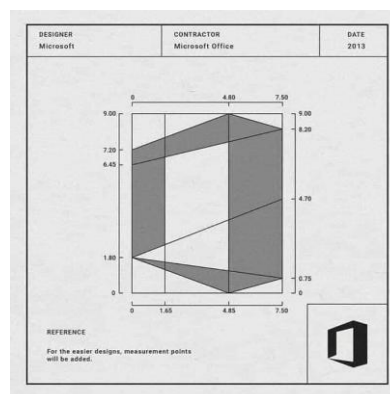
**Designer:** Arnell Group

**Colours:** Patriotic palette (red, white, blue); simplified to red/white

**Concept:** It stands for the smile/energy you feel when you are refreshed through a smiling globe which is an integral part of the global rebranding strategy that blends heritage with modern optimism. Circular/diagonal grids guarantee that the white "smile" arc keeps the exact curvature on packaging.

Overlapping circles depict lens-like distortions of the surface, which gives the visual a 3D effect, while the grid sets the anchor for the balanced asymmetry. Pepsi's journey from a script-type brand to a more geometric one is a reflection of their brand strategy that has matured over time<sup>vii</sup>.

#### Case Study 5: Microsoft Office Logo, 2013



**Designer:** Microsoft internal team

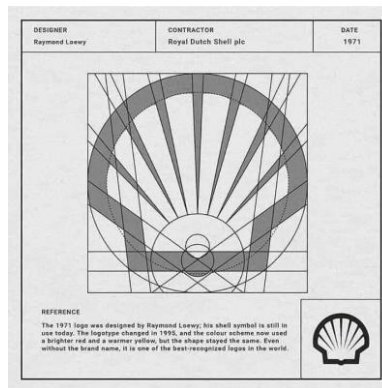
**Colours:** Multicolour ribbon (blue, green, red, yellow); app-specific variants

**Concept:** The ribbon figure alludes to the productivity tool that is being "unfolded". Thus it unifies all suite apps under one integrated ecosystem. Through the use of isometric modular grid the 3D effect is created by the different angled planes which can be scaled down for software icons.

Vertical modules and diagonals control taper and depth, allowing consistent adaptation for Word (blue) or Excel (green). The grid is what keeps the office family together across the cloud tools of the 365 suite that keeps on growing<sup>viii</sup>.

Figure 4

### Case Study 6: Shell Logo, 1971



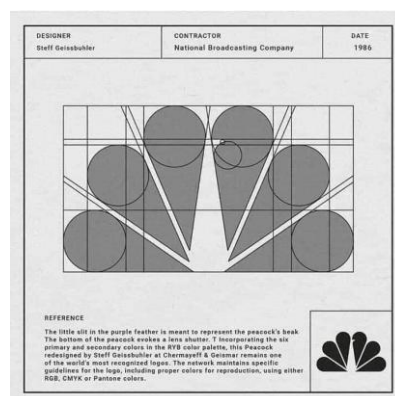
**Designer:** Raymond Loewy

**Colours:** Yellow/red (rays/scallop); simplified to red/yellow.

**Concept:** The simplified pecten shell is connected to a natural source of energy and the outward rays are a symbol of fuel that powers progress. The radial grid of 1971 (refined 1995) structures rays evenly from circular base.

Sketches for logos showing a shell in an abstract manner was at the time done by the artists Raymond Loewy and Andy Warhol who were working for the same advertising agency. Their work doesn't actually show much evidence of correlative lines and turning points from the past and today logos. The supposed colours come from the main visual identity colours, while a red shell on a yellow background was used the very first time in 1904. This colour scheme was later changed to the opposite scheme. The radial grid gives the rays a pattern that radiates out from the circle base and the pattern is consistent even at the places where the rays bisect the circle circumference. Therefore, the arcs and the so-called spokes relate to the common center and radii. So, the logo's readability isn't compromised at the petrol pumps even though the yellow is a high-contrast colour. The Shell logo is timeless, yet its design is based on geometric shapes, and the company has been evolving constantly for over 100 years - from oil to energy transition<sup>ix</sup>.

Figure 5

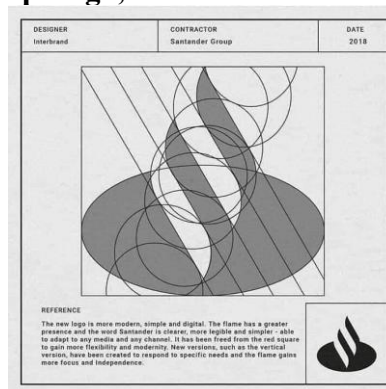




**Case Study 7: NBC Peacock Logo, 1986****Designer:** Steff Geissbuhler**Colours :** Six RGB peacock hues (blue, turquoise, spring green, yellow, orange, magenta).

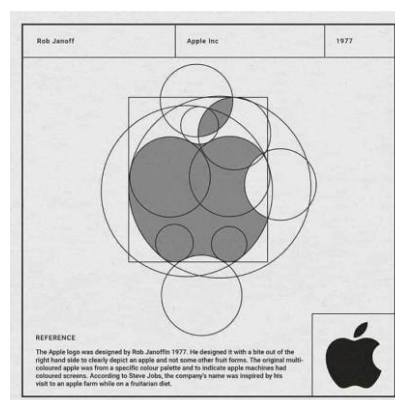
**Concept:** The peacock's fan-shaped tail is a pictogram of the broadcast spectrum and thus diversity of programming. The fan / circular grid determines the equal displacement of the 6 peacock feathers plus the purple beak together forming a stable 7 elements mass.

The binary lines make 180° semicircle division exactly and colour dominance is balanced. By respecting the constraints of grid NBC keeps its colour TV invention feature while its monochrome fallback is equally feature-packed.

**Case Study 8: Santander Group Logo, 2018****Designer:** Interbrand**Colours :** Red flame on white/black; square variants phased out.

**Concept:** The Flame stands for warmth, passion, ambition for wealth and it has been simplified to become digital-friendly. The proportional/diagonal grids add mobility to the flame by liberating it from the square, thus the flame becomes the focus. Among the shapes and angles the S-curve taper is most refined thus prioritizing clarity on mobiles. The evolution of the grid corresponds to the digital shift in banking which is all about the framework becoming the emotional centrepiece<sup>x</sup>.

Figure 6

**Case Study 9: Apple Inc. Logo, 1977**

**Designer:** Rob Janoff

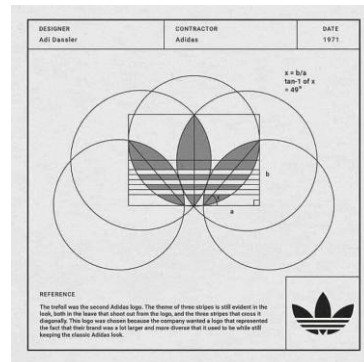
**Colours:** Initially rainbow stripes (6 Pantone colours); changed to monochrome black/white/silver.

**Concept:** The bitten apple is a play on "byte," it is a tribute to the colourful display of Apple II while possession of the knowledge/innovation is forbidden. The golden ratio /concentric circles are used to blend the natural shape with the t he leaf and bite have been accurately formed and are perfectly scalable from a favicon to a billboard using the intersecting circles. The green light given to the invention by

Figure 7

The rainbow colours is a long gone memory; nowadays the minimalist approach is synonymous with high quality premium<sup>xi</sup>.

#### Case Study 10: Adidas Trefoil Logo, 1971



**Designer:** Adolf Dassler (refined)

**Colours :** Green/black/white; trefoil on striped base.

**Concept:** Three leaves/continents represent global sports presence; integrates heritage stripes for authenticity. Circular/diagonal grid overlaps leaves symmetrically around trefoil clover.

Three circles + diagonals lock 120° rhythm, echoing three stripes. Grid sustains vintage appeal on lifestyle gear, distinct from performance logos.

Figure 8

| Company          | Year | Primary Colours | Core Concept        | Grid Type         |
|------------------|------|-----------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| PBS              | 1984 | Blue/white      | Diverse voices      | Modular square    |
| Mitsubishi       | 1964 | Red/white       | Engineering crest   | Triangular        |
| Twitter          | 2012 | Blue            | Real-time flight    | Circular          |
| Pepsi            | 2008 | Red/white/blue  | Smiling globe       | Circular/diagonal |
| Microsoft Office | 2013 | Multicolour     | Productivity ribbon | Isometric modular |

|           |      |                      |                    |                       |
|-----------|------|----------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|
| Shell     | 1971 | Red/yellow           | Radiating energy   | Radial                |
| NBC       | 1986 | 6 peacock hues       | Broadcast spectrum | Fan/circular          |
| Santander | 2018 | Red                  | Financial flame    | Proportional/diagonal |
| Apple     | 1977 | Rainbow → monochrome | Innovation bite    | Golden ratio circles  |
| Adidas    | 1971 | Green/black          | Global trefoil     | Circular/diagonal     |

## Conclusion

The grid-based method is at the core of creating corporate logos that are not only visually attractive but also functionally sound in line with the complex brand ecosystems. The ten case studies reveal that many of the world's most familiar logos are supported by well-thought-out square, circular, triangular, and proportional grids that control aspects like curvature, alignment, and white space. These systems, instead of limiting creativity, serve as a shared language of proportion and rhythm that designers can use for conveying different strategic messages such as being neutral in the public service (PBS), precise in engineering (Mitsubishi), elegant in technology (Apple), and lively in broadcasting (NBC).

Aligning with grid principles during logo creation also enhances the connection between symbols and typography. Wordmarks, taglines, and sub-brand lockups are made to come together harmoniously in a consistent manner in print, packaging, signage, and digital interfaces. As Müller-Brockmann and Samara illustrate, to break the grid intelligently, one has first to understand the grid's reasoning. This can be done either by introducing subtle asymmetries or by allowing expressive deviations that still respect underlying proportions. For both researchers and practitioners, these cases highlight that long-lasting brand images seldom rely only on stylistic trends. They remain because their geometry is disciplined enough to withstand technological changes for decades while still managing to be clear, balanced, and unmistakably their own.

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