



THE COMPANY LOGOTYPES AT THE TURN OF THE DIGITAL AGE: A CASE STUDY – IBM, APPLE, KODAK

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Abstract:

This paper analyzes the evolution of corporate visual identity from the era of the "economy of scarcity" and print-first solutions to the contemporary "economy of abundance" and digital-first principles. Using the theoretical framework of David Harvey's compression of space and time and Marshall McLuhan's concept of the global village, the research explores how technological shifts - primarily the internet and mobile platforms - dictate morphological changes in logotypes. The focus is on the transition from complex, closed geometric forms to minimalist, adaptive solutions that enable instant visual communication. Through a comparative multiple case study, the paper examines how giants like IBM and Apple successfully transformed their identities to fit new media, in contrast to Kodak, whose visual and strategic identity collapsed due to inadequate adaptation to the digital paradigm. It is concluded that in the era of information hyperproduction, the reduction of visual expression becomes a key factor for market survival.

Keywords:

Logotype, Redesign, IBM, Apple, Kodak.

INTRODUCTION

The logotype represents a fundamental segment of corporate identity, a graphic entity designed to convey a message and establish immediate contact with the consumer. While some logotypes defy time (e.g., Coca-Cola) [1], most undergo necessary redesign processes to avoid obsolescence and loss of market relevance.

Historically, from the first registered trademark (Bass Brewery, 1876) to the end of the 20th century, logo design was conditioned by the limitations and rules of physical media (paper, packaging, transport) [2].

The digital age, especially the rise of smartphones and social networks, imposes new imperatives: speed and scalability. A user scrolling on a touchscreen has no time to decipher complex symbols.

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This technological pressure led to a paradigm shift: from print-first principles - Pantone model colours; (CMYK models, fixed grids) to a digital-first approach (RGB, adaptability, minimalism). Contemporary visual identity must be fluid, capable of retaining recognizability on both a billboard and a mobile app icon. This paper analyses this transition through the lens of three global brands - IBM, Apple, and Kodak - demonstrating how adaptation of visual language to the new age directly correlates with corporate success. Ease of Use.

2. METHODOLOGY

The research is based on qualitative analysis and the application of the comparative method through a Multiple Case Study format. The subjects of analysis are the corporate visual identities of IBM, Apple, and Kodak, selected as representative examples of adaptation to technological changes from 1900 to the present.

The research utilizes an interdisciplinary approach, synthesizing insights from graphic design, marketing, and sociology of culture. The analytical procedure was conducted in three phases:

- Historical-Descriptive Analysis: Determining the evolution of logotypes in the context of the shift from the "economy of scarcity" to the "economy of abundance;"
- Visual-Semiotic Analysis: Decoding changes in logotype morphology (from complex forms to minimalism). This tests the hypothesis that visual reduction is a direct consequence of the need for faster communication in the "global village; and
- Comparison of Outcomes: Comparing the success of redesigns relative to market position, testing the thesis on "space-time compression" - specifically, how the ability to visually condense correlates with information flow speed.

Primary sources include corporate publications (Brand Manuals), scientific papers, and relevant digital content preserved in the Internet Archive (Wayback Machine) [3], providing access to historical digital materials no longer active online.

3. CASE STUDIES

3.1. IBM

IBM represents one of the most durable examples of corporate branding.

The company was founded in the late 19th century [4]. Over time, it shifted its business activities and ownership - evolving from a manufacturer of household clocks and scales to mainframe computers (such as the renowned System/360), eventually orienting itself toward integrated systems (PCs), and culminating in global leadership in computing, cloud technologies, and the development of AI platforms.

The brand's value on the capital market is estimated at \$276 billion (2026) [5].

Key Phases of Logo Evolution:

1. Period 1888 - 1924: The company was formed through the merger of several firms. In this period, logos were replete with decorative details. The trademark application was optimized for paper, product packaging, billboards, and other forms of outdoor advertising.
2. The First IBM Globe Logo (1924 - 1946): The company changed its name to International Business Machines to align with its new business and market orientation. A logo appeared featuring an inscription that followed the curvature of a globe [6]. The design projected a message of corporate progress and the transcending of American borders, a value highly regarded by consumers at the time. The company trademark was recognizable in Europe during World War II. From this period to the present, the company's activity has remained within the field of information technology [7].
3. 1947 - 1955: Minimalist Transition: Replacing pictorial elements and the globe, the logo became typographic, composed of three initial letters—IBM. This was a stride toward a minimalist, easily recognizable design that would later undergo only minor modifications. The inscription "IBM" was rendered in a bold, sans-serif font in a specific blue hue. A successful major company, IBM recognized the importance of visual identity for both the present and the future.
4. Paul Rand (1916–1996) [8] in the project: Evolving its visual identity design. By then, Rand already enjoyed the status of a graphic design icon due to a series of successful graphic achievements.



Paul Rand's Design Philosophy: "Design is not decoration - design is a solution to a problem" [8].

- The definitive version IBM logo 1972: And endures defiantly today as a model of the minimalist approach, universal applicability, simplicity, and orientation toward the digital age. The concept of a typographic sign was retained in essence, now consisting of eight horizontal segments. The segments are coloured in a distinctive hue - IBM Blue. The advantages of the new design are reflected in several aspects:

- Memorability: It is easy to remember and recognize quickly, which is the most important characteristic for the company (brand perception).
- Scalability: Better legibility on small formats (including the design of a 16x16 pixel favicon for the company website).
- Application: Easier application on products (embossing, engraving, offset printing, screen printing), adhering to a "print-first" logic initially.
- Digital Readability: Easily readable on the transparent screens of various computer types (digital first).
- Longevity: The version has remained unchanged for over 50 years, a rarity in the world of branding.

IBM Today (2026) uses the same 8-bar logo but applies it very flexibly:

- Full Colour: (IBM Blue - Pantone 2718C/ approx. #0530AD) for application on physical materials;
- Monochromatic: (Black, white, grey); and
- Cropped/Animated: Versions used in digital environments.

- Deconstructed: Sometimes only the "I" or just the stripes are used in specific campaigns. Today, logos are designed on a "Digital-First" principle, emphasizing communication adaptability with the consumer.

3.2. APPLE

The Apple logo has its own developmental path, even though the company has been focused on computer technologies since its founding. The area of business orientation has not changed. Not only did it track the accelerated transformations of desktop and lightweight computer capabilities, but the company itself was the creator of models that promoted innovations resulting from their development team's efforts.

Regarding market capitalization, Apple is a global brand leader. Apple was declared the most valuable global brand in 2026, with an estimated brand value alone of over \$3,650 trillion [12].

The company was registered in 1975 as a Startup with small initial capital from three co-founders.

- The First Logo: Designed by one of the co-founders, Ronald Wayne [12], in 1976. This logo was essentially an illustration in the Victorian style with numerous details. It depicted Isaac Newton sitting under an apple tree reading a book, with an apple hanging above his head. Nature was depicted ornately. The logo was wrapped in a wide ribbon inscribed with "Apple Computer Co." The author later explained what he wanted to convey with the logo: to emphasize intellectuality, innovation, and the scientific spirit. However, the logo was too complex, old-fashioned, and unusable for small formats (stickers, business cards).



Figure 1. Current IBM logotype (Paul Rand, 1972) [9].



Figure 2. Current Apple logotype (Apple design team, 2013) [10].



Figure 3. Current Kodak logotype (Work Order, 2016) [11].



Most importantly, it lacked synergistic power. It could not be memorized due to many unnecessary details. The lifespan of this logo lasted eight months. It was replaced by a different graphic solution. Dissatisfied with a visual identity reduced to the level of a complex picture, Steve Jobs sought a simpler logo. The idea regarding Newton as the greatest scientist of Western civilization was retained conceptually. The new logo featured an apple, slightly bitten.

- The "Rainbow" Apple (1977 - 1998): Designer Rob Janoff [13] authored the new Apple visual identity in the shape of an apple, depicted as Adam's biblical sin - a fruit bitten in one part. The initial idea to depict a plum was rejected because rendering a plum on small formats would be difficult. The idea of biblical sin acted as a type of provocation. The logo was displayed in colour, with equal segments changing from top to bottom (green, yellow, orange, red, violet, and blue). Interestingly, this colour spectrum is only seemingly a rainbow. It is unknown whether the error inducing anarchy was intentional, but the fact is that the arrangement of rainbow colours in nature differs from the logo. The insistence on a coloured logo was likely linked to Apple desktop computers featuring colour screens. Apple entered the market as the first brand selling a compact colour computer. This visual identity model lasted until 1998.
- The Monochrome Era (1998 - Present): With the return of Steve Jobs to the company (1997), numerous cuts occurred. The coloured logo was discarded, and the firm returned to a monochromatic solution. The reason for the change was a transition from a "colourful and fun" image to a premium, professional, and minimalist corporate identity [14]. Initially, it was a monochromatic apple on a grey or white surface. The logo became single-coloured (first black, later white or chrome). The most frequently used versions were translucent/white on a dark background and chrome/metallic 3D (particularly on Mac computers 2001 - 2007). The idea of a 3D logo emerged; Apple's graphic software and the quality of graphics cards and monitors could process and display that difference.
- The Flat Design Phase: Began in 2013 and continues today. This involves a complete transition to flat, monochromatic design. The logo consists of

a white apple icon on a black, inverse surface, or the black surface is replaced by a variant of grey. In any case, it concerns the application of digital-age principles: maximum minimization for easy user memorization. Gradients as contents of 3D apple icons were removed. The logo is aligned with the iOS operating system and minimalist design trends oriented toward a "digital-first" design philosophy.

The path of the company's development and rise coincides perfectly with the changes in the logo. From a garage startup idea with a visual identity that lagged more than a century behind the trends of that time, to the simple flat design of one of the most valuable brands in the world.

3.3.KODAK

Kodak was founded by George Eastman [15] in 1888 with the vision of making photography as simple "as a pencil." For more than a century, the company was synonymous with film and photography, but it underwent dramatic changes in the market, particularly at the beginning of this century.

Kodak is credited with the commercialization of black-and-white and colour photography materials, as well as black-and-white and colour film materials, which ignited a passion in individuals to preserve important life events as photographs or moving images. For decades in America, and later the world, it was synonymous with the photography and film material industry. In the early 1980s, Kodak held 80% of the American market for amateur film for cameras and movie cameras. Furthermore, the professional film industry was based on a raw material base consisting of Kodak film stock and chemistry for processing. In radiology, Kodak products in the form of various film plates for imaging human organs using X-ray machines were in use until the end of the first decade of the 21st century. Kodak designed the camera and film stock used by the astronauts of Apollo 11, the first manned spacecraft to successfully land on the Moon (July 1969).

However, digitalization was strongly implemented in the areas of professional and amateur equipment and radiology, which brought Kodak the highest revenues. The development of mobile phones and the successful integration of digital cameras recording sharp and clear photos, along with the appearance of digital DSLR and compact cameras based on electronic sensors for image generation, caused interest in the analogue world of Kodak's product range to plummet rapidly.



Kodak could not realign itself, or rather, make the great transition from the analogue to the digital world. Its product palette was very broad, and no one could financially support such an investment.

It is an interesting fact that Kodak actually invented the first digital camera in 1975, authored by Steve Sasson [16]. At one point, Kodak entered the market with a compact digital camera featuring a strong zoom lens and quality optics. Their visual identity was ready for the future, but management did not think so.

Kodak's headquarters are in Rochester (USA). The company's activity consists of the production of plates and chemical agents for deep colour printing and film stock for some Hollywood companies and directors accustomed to the analogue era. A portion of Kodak's revenue comes from selling licensing rights (visual identity) to less significant companies from Asia engaged in the production of SSDs and other digital memory media.

The company generates revenue of about \$1.12 billion annually (2023).

Logo Evolution:

- 1907: Kodak published its first logo. On a white surface (negative), a circle was implemented within which the ligature of the letters "EKC" (Eastman Kodak Company) was integrated - the initials of the company founder in circle [17]. The circle symbolized authority and integrity, which was common for state seals at the time. The logo did not have a developed brand strategy but served primarily for company identification;
- 1935: A new visual identity appeared, completely different from the previous one. On an orange-yellow background (negative) of a rectangular shape, the word "Kodak" was written in red. This logo introduced the graphic elements and company colours that would be used in redesigns in subsequent decades. As a whole, the logo represented the anchor of visual identity for all future changes: [18];
 - Symbolism: Yellow symbolizes joy, optimism, light, and creativity, while red signifies energy, passion, and warmth;
 - Colour and Typography: Yellow background (Pantone 1235C), red inscription (Pantone 485C). The serif typography reflects traditional values; and
 - Expected Message: Focus on the emotional connection with users—photography as a means of recording happy moments.

- 1971: Kodak placed a period on the visual identity of the analogue era when a new logo was promoted. It became easily memorable and scalable for use, precisely during the years of the company's greatest rise. On a yellow background acting as a contrast, the letter "K" was implemented as a design puzzle reminiscent of the rays of a cinema projector. The rays change the direction of light and its power. In the logo, they fill the space and create the letter "K". In the middle of the graphic sign is the inscription "Kodak" in a serif font in red. This logo became a global symbol of photography. It was designed by Peter Oestreich [18].
- 2006: The Kodak logo described above (as older generations remember it) was valid until 2006. In the digital era, Kodak introduced a minimalist wordmark: only the word "Kodak" in red, between two thin yellow lines, without the square or graphic elements. Designed by Allen Hori (Identity Design): [19].
 - Symbolism: Minimalism, flexibility, and universality. This logo was adapted for digital platforms and global use. It consisted of a red sans-serif inscription "Kodak" and yellow lines, with no additional graphic elements on a white background;
 - Management Message: Distancing from the film (analogue) past and positioning in the category of a digital brand; and
 - The Crisis Years: The following years (concluding with 2012) were the hardest in the company's history. Bankruptcy proceedings were initiated. The company sold about 1,700 patents in the field of digital photography and film to a joint consortium of Google and Apple for the sum of \$525 million, which was far below the expected price.
- 2016 - The Return: The new management of the restructured giant - composed of bankers, investment fund owners, insurance companies, and small shareholders - brought back the old logo, with the difference that the word "Kodak" is now written in capital letters vertically inside the letter "K", aiming to trigger associations with the perforations that serve for the movement of film strips. The graphic designer Work Order designed the comeback logo in 2016 with the vertical brand inscription. This logo lives on today.

Kodak serves as a cautionary tale of a brand losing touch with technological reality.



3.4. DISCUSSION

The comparative analysis confirms that logotype evolution is not merely aesthetic but a response to the "compression of space and time."

- IBM applied a strategy of anticipation. By adopting a "digital" look (stripes) in the 1970s, they ensured stability.
- Apple applied a strategy of radical reduction. Jobs' decision to strip away colour in 1998 proved that in an economy of attention, the logo must be a symbol of quality, not a distraction.
- Kodak suffered from discontinuity. Their visual wandering mirrored their strategic confusion regarding the shift from film to digital sensors.

For production systems, the year 1998 marked a pivotal shift from physical to digital asset management. The integration of the "My Pictures" folder within the Windows 98 environment, along with the aggressive promotion of the paperless office concept, compelled a redefinition of organizational literacy. This transition effectively declared the obsolescence of analogue documentation and traditional archiving methods well before digital hardware achieved market dominance.

Authoritative, deeply structured technical documentation (data registries) was replaced by fragmented digital information formats. In this context, the company's visual identity - the logo - transitioned from a static physical mark to a dynamic digital asset, embedded within the emerging ERP logic that demanded a standardized, digital-first approach to production management. This encompassed inputs and outputs, communication, and marketing [20].

The centralization of network infrastructure in 1998, catalysed by the monopoly of Internet Explorer 4.0, established the "digital corridors" essential for contemporary production logistics. By integrating the web browser directly into the operating system via Active Desktop, Microsoft eliminated the functional barrier between local production data and global market networks.

This standardization was a necessary precondition for the implementation of e-banking as a form of e-commerce within production systems, providing a uniform platform of trust for centralized payment processors [21]. Furthermore, the founding of Google and the institutionalization of the network through ICANN [22] marked the end of the decentralized "engineering romanticism." For production systems, this meant that visibility and market presence were no longer merely

a matter of local quality, but increasingly a question of compliance with a centralized, global digital infrastructure.

The essential conditions for the transition from the analogue to the digital era were established in 1998.

4. CONCLUSION

The study concludes that in the "society of abundance," the survival of corporate identity depends on visual essentialization. The technological imperative - shifting from physical media to high-resolution small screens - has changed the nature of the logotype.

- Function over Form: Readability in milliseconds is paramount.
- Death of the Narrative: Complex stories (like Newton's apple) have no place in a high-speed information flow.
- Digital First: Brands that fail to optimize for the pixel risk becoming invisible.

IBM understood the structure, Apple understood the user through uncompromising reduction, while Kodak lingered too long in the past.

The research confirms that the evolution of company visual identity is not merely an aesthetic progression but a direct reflection of deeper technological shifts. While the case study illustrates the formal transformation of logos, the discussion reveals that these changes are inextricably linked to the infrastructural cornerstone established in 1998.

The transition from analogue sovereignty to centralized digital control - catalysed by the Windows 98 shell integration, the IE 4.0 monopoly, and the emergence of algorithmic arbitration (Google) - permanently redefined the role of company symbols within production systems. Logos have ceased to be mere physical marks of quality and have become digital assets optimized for a centralized network environment.

Ultimately, this paper concludes that digitalization in production systems is an ongoing extension of the paradigms set in 1998. Recognizing this historical framework is essential for understanding how modern company identities operate within a landscape defined by institutional control and algorithmic mediation rather than individual engineering romanticism.



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