



APPEARANCE MATTERS

How to foot it with the big boys!

GARY CRILLEY

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Title	Appearance Matters
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Format	Print
Publication Date	2026
ISBN	978-1-0673095-1-0
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All text, illustrations and photography*	Gary Crilley
Layout and design, including cover design	Gary Crilley

* All may have been used in the editing and assembly of some of the images, in particular those involving mice and elephants.



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Appearance Matters!

LEVEL THE PLAYING FIELD AGAINST
MUCH LARGER COMPETITORS WITH
DESIGN

Introduction

QUESTION: Does size really matter?

ANSWER: It depends.

If a potential customer or client is presented with two options – a large nationwide company and a sole trader – and has the opportunity to speak to representatives of both, read their testimonials, and assess their product or service, then size is immaterial.



But that scenario is rare. More likely, they'll come across the two options through an internet search, social media ads, or by driving past premises or signage.

What is the difference between your *small* company and the much larger companies you compete against?

Why does size make a difference?

First of all, by 'large companies', we're talking about organisations with anywhere from 10 to 1,000 employees, or maybe a nationwide franchise with 20, 50, or 200 franchisees.

We're not talking about the international corporation with 25,000 employees and branches in every town and city. You know, the outfit that has no phone number or direct email address on its website, but instead forces you to wade through hundreds of 'options' in its HELP menu or play Russian Roulette with chatbots whenever anything goes wrong. If it does have a phone number, it's a call centre in the Philippines.



So, why larger companies?

Longevity

A brand-new plumbing company doesn't start on Monday with three branches, seven vans, and nine fully qualified plumbers with all the latest machinery needed for a professional job. Size, therefore, indicates that a company has been around for a while.

That, in turn, means experience and a track record.

A tiny company or sole trader may also have both experience and a track record, but it may also have only – literally – started on Monday.

More to lose

Rightly or wrongly, people often think a larger company has more to lose if it messes up than a small operator does.

A chain of command

Some customers like the idea that the person they're dealing with has a boss, perhaps even

another above them. 'I want to speak to the manager!' remains an effective tactic when things go wrong or when seeking a discount.

The latest equipment

Rightly or wrongly, the perception persists that larger companies can afford the latest and greatest equipment and tools.

So how do customers know how big a company is?

Large companies

Large (and medium) companies have a few common features that even a layperson can notice, though they may not know why. These features instil confidence in clients and customers and often drive key decisions about whom to give their business to.



Here is a list of features that all large companies have in common:

- A professional and unique logo
- Consistent branding
- A professional-looking, unique website
- A USP* that persists throughout their public persona

*USP: Unique selling proposition. This is what sets you apart from your competition. You need to be the BEST, the FASTEST, the CHEAPEST, the MOST RELIABLE or something else.

Small companies and sole traders

The minnows of the world often announce themselves with elements that come purely from a lack of startup capital.

- WordArt or an internet- or AI-derived logo
- Inconsistent branding

- Design mistakes (spelling errors, missing apostrophes in output, etc.)
- A free DIY or template website

Down the track

It's not uncommon for a bargain-basement start-up to get busy, then grow, and forget the shortcuts it took when it was still fresh and penniless.

Many medium-sized companies still have cheap logos and websites, lack a branding structure, and eventually wonder why they are falling behind their competitors.

Close the gap

This book explains the 'whys' and 'whats' behind appearing cheap to would-be customers, then the 'hows' of fixing and remedying the issues.

NOTE: It doesn't necessarily mean contracting a big city agency and outlaying a house deposit to 'refresh the brand'.





Chapter 1: You Began in Good Faith

When you started your business, appearance was the last thing on your mind. You were focused on the product, the service, the customers, and simply keeping the doors open. Every dollar spent on a logo or a website felt like a dollar not spent on stock, wages, or rent. That instinct wasn't wrong. It was survival. But the shortcuts taken in those early, cash-strapped months rarely stay 'temporary' – they quietly become the permanent face of your business.

This chapter looks at how those early decisions get made, why franchises are so appealing to people who want to skip this whole problem, and why buying into one isn't the only way to get a professional appearance from day one.



The source of all your issues

Most appearance problems in small business can be traced back to a single moment: the scramble to get “something” in place quickly and cheaply, without a plan for what comes next.

Cheap, WordArt, or AI logo

The logo is usually the first thing a new business owner tackles, and also the thing most often rushed. A quick job in Word, a free online logo generator, or a few prompts to an AI image tool can produce something that looks fine on a laptop screen at 2am, but falls apart the moment it needs to work at other sizes, in black and white, embroidered on a shirt, or next to a competitor’s professionally designed mark.

Send logo to signwriter with no specific guidelines to follow

That same rushed logo then gets emailed to a signwriter with no colour codes, no clear space rules, and no guidance on how it should be used.

The signwriter does their best with what they’re given, but without a brief they’ll make their own calls on sizing, colour, and layout — calls that may not match what happens next at the printer, or the website.

Send logo to printer for business cards

The business cards come next, often from a different supplier again, working from a different file, with no reference to what the signwriter produced. Small inconsistencies creep in: a slightly different blue, a stretched logo, a font substitution because the “special” font wasn’t supplied. None of it looks wrong in isolation, but nothing lines up.

Send logo to website company advertising \$499 websites

Finally, the same logo lands with a budget website builder, dropped into a generic template alongside thousands of other businesses using the same layout. By this point, the business has three or four different “versions” of itself circulating in public, none of them planned, all of them slightly different.



NOTE: It's not unusual for a new business owner to forget the logo altogether (or decide to put it off for now) and then when they realise they need business cards, they contact the printer to '*do them some business cards*', and the lack of a logo becomes an issue. That's when the printer offers to design a logo for them – for a fee. The end result is that numerous businesses have logos that were designed by the printer.

Why do people buy franchises?

Given how easy it is for a DIY approach to go sideways, it's no surprise that many people choose to buy into a franchise instead of building a brand from scratch.

It gives them a head start on appearances

A franchise arrives with a finished logo, a colour palette, signage templates, a website, and a marketing kit – all designed once, professionally, and rolled out consistently to every location. The franchisee simply switches it on.

It removes the burden of multiple decisions

Buying a franchise hands over a whole list of decisions that most new business owners find overwhelming or simply don't have the skills for: naming the business, branding the business, creating promotional material, and buying a website. Each of these would otherwise need its own research, budget, and supplier.



Why you shouldn't buy a franchise

For all that convenience, a franchise is not the only route to a professional appearance, and it comes with real costs of its own.

The drawbacks of buying a franchise

The upfront cost of a franchise licence can run into tens or hundreds of thousands of dollars before you've served a single customer. On top of that sit the ongoing costs: franchise fees, usually a percentage of revenue, paid indefinitely regardless of how the business performs. The supplied branding and marketing material isn't always ideal for your specific location or customer base, and you have limited say in changing it. Perhaps most importantly, your reputation depends on other franchisees as much as yourself — a poorly run outlet three suburbs away can damage how customers see your business, through no fault of your own.

Franchises aren't perfect

Another issue is the age of the franchise. Sure, everything was professionally designed at the outset. But designs do get old.

Most businesses refresh their branding every five to ten years. But now that 100 franchisees are scattered across the country, each with sign-written vans, uniforms, business cards, and stationery, the cost of a franchise brand refresh is astronomical.

Not to mention the blowback the franchise owner will get from 100 franchisees who now have to pay thousands to 'rebrand'.

This results in many franchise brands appearing tired and dated, reducing the very advantages that buying a franchise offered in the first place.



How to get the advantages of a franchise without the ongoing fees

The good news is that the appearance advantage of a franchise isn't magic, and it isn't exclusive to franchises either.

The franchise branding was produced by a professional designer.

You too can have professional branding if you engage a professional designer. The polished logo, the consistent signage, the coordinated website: all of it came from a design process that you can commission independently, once, without an ongoing percentage of your revenue attached to it.

The rest of this book explains exactly how.

Logo Examples

On the following pages are some examples of dated, WordArt or unprofessional logos. They're paired with a modern updates, and in one case, more than one option.

In most cases, the general shape of the graphic (if present) is retained. This aids visual recognition if the company has a good history. For that reason, the colours also remain constant, if relevant.





JOHNSON BROTHERS



JOHNSON
BROTHERS





JOHNSON BROTHERS





Chapter 2: The Visible Difference

Once you know what to look for, the gap between a professionally branded business and a self-assembled one becomes obvious. And once you've seen it, you can't unsee it. This chapter breaks down exactly what gives a cobbled-together brand away, and what a genuinely professional one looks like in practice.

How can you tell a professional brand from one that was cobbled together?

There is a handful of tell-tale signs that separate the two, and most customers notice them even if they can't explain why.



Pixellated logos

A logo that's blurry, jagged, or pixelated on a website, sign, or vehicle almost always means it was saved as a low-resolution image rather than built as scalable artwork. It's one of the fastest ways to signal "amateur" without saying a word.

Overcomplicated logos

In the early 1900s, logos were pieces of art. Most older companies still in operation have simplified their logos considerably over the decades. But many AI or internet logos revert to the 'artwork' style and immediately look dated.

Aged logos that follow software development

In 2000, Photoshop introduced Layer Styles, which gave designers access to Bevel & Emboss, and a one-click drop shadow. For the next 2-3 years, logos (and other designs) demonstrated the full range of potential these tools created. By 2005, they were seriously 'old-school'.

Word doc output

Flyers, invoices, or menus that are visibly laid out in Word or a similar office program – with default fonts, awkward spacing, and clip-art-style graphics – read as unfinished, even if the information on them is accurate and useful.

Grammatical and other errors

Spelling mistakes, missing apostrophes, and inconsistent punctuation in public-facing material chip away at trust. Customers reasonably assume that a business careless with its own words might be careless with their order, their booking, or their money.

Inconsistent copy

When the tone, terminology, or level of formality changes from the website to the social media page to the invoice, it creates a subtle sense that no one is really in charge of the brand: because usually, no one is.



Outdated website elements

Stock photos that look dated, a mobile layout that doesn't quite work, or a design style left over from a decade ago all signal that the business hasn't been maintained, even if the products or service behind it is excellent.

The large professional company

By contrast, a well-run brand shows a very different set of signals.

Consistent branding across all platforms

The same logo, colours, fonts, and tone appear whether a customer sees the business on a shop-front, a van, a website, or a social media post. Nothing needs to be reconciled in the customer's head – it all reads as one company.

A branding book for others to follow

Behind that consistency is usually a simple document: a set of rules covering logo use, colours, fonts, alignment, location and tone of voice, so

that anyone producing material for the business, whether an internal team member or an outside supplier, gets the same result every time.

A consistent message across all platforms

Beyond the visuals, the actual message and value proposition stay aligned too. The website, the social media captions, and the printed material all reinforce the same core promise to the customer, rather than pulling in different directions.

The branding book

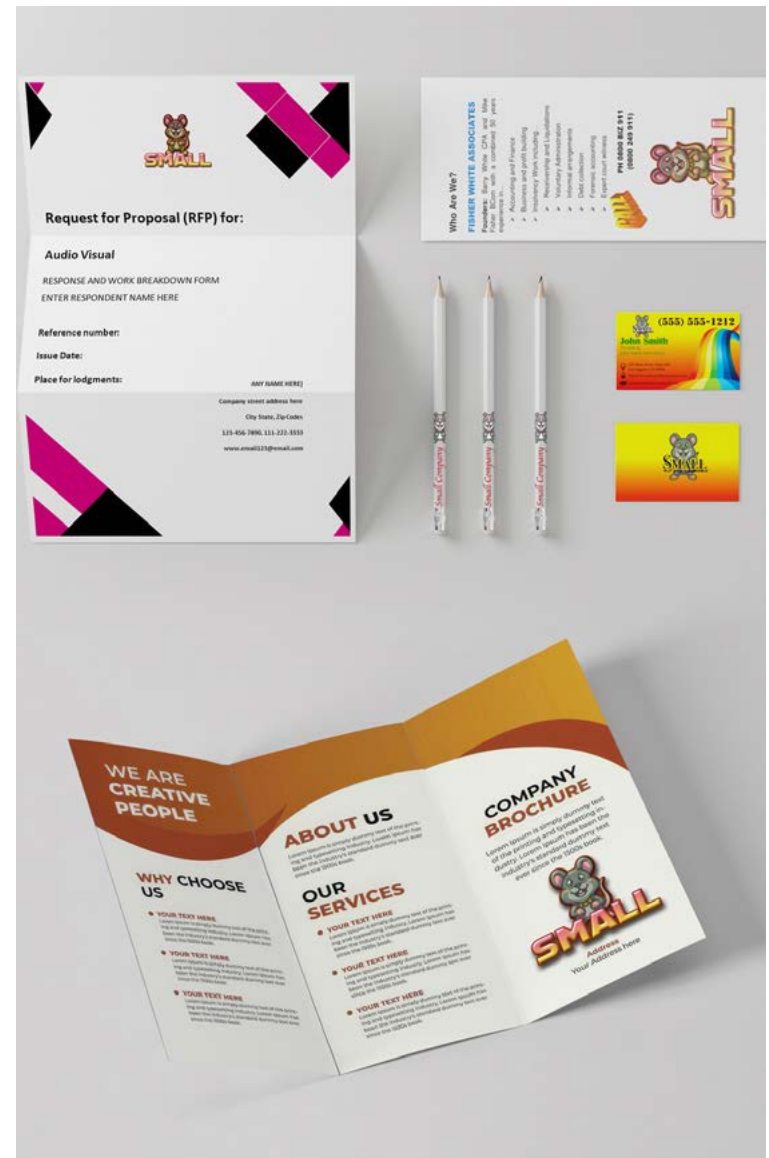
A branding book doesn't need to be a weighty corporate manual. For a small business, it can be a handful of pages covering logo placement and minimum size, the exact colours (with codes, not just 'blue'), the fonts to use, and a few lines on how the business should 'sound' in writing. Its value isn't its length; it's that it exists in the first place, so consistency survives new staff, new suppliers, and new marketing pushes.



Some examples of small vs big

The following pages display an example of the disjointed nature of many small companies (exaggerated maybe?) followed by a simple example of what small businesses are up against.

Note: These are cobbled together examples to show a visual difference, not complete branding exercises.





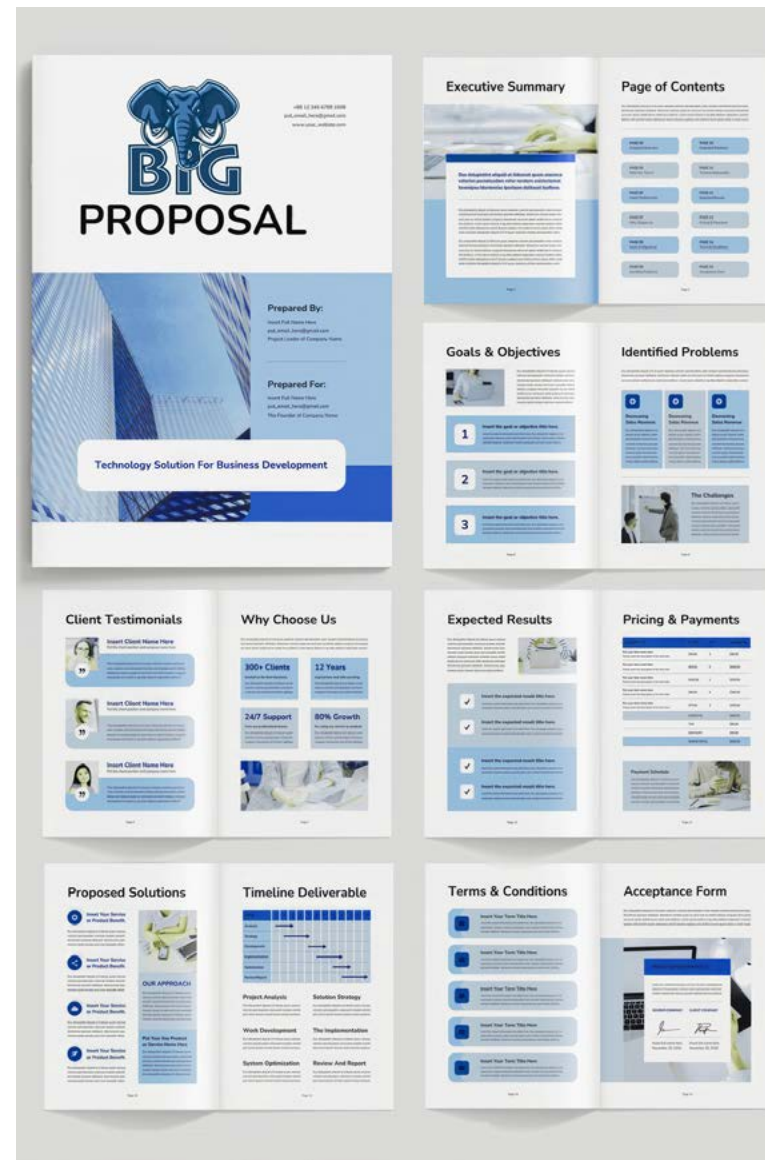
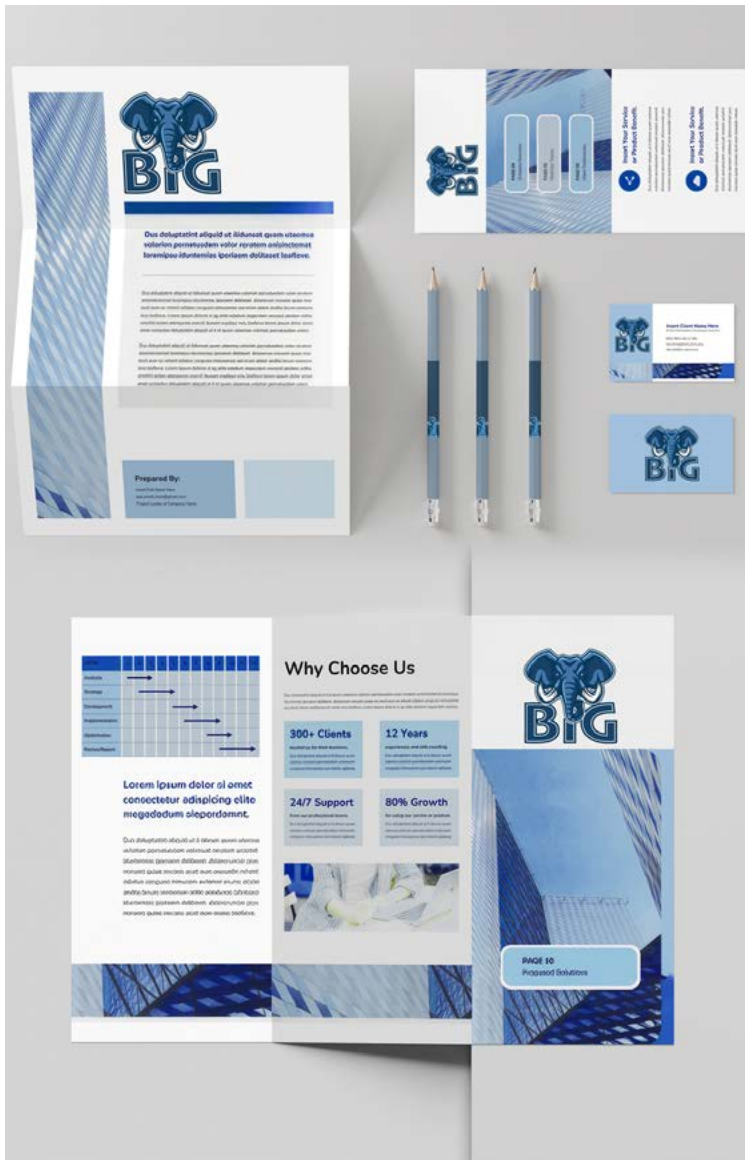
SMALL

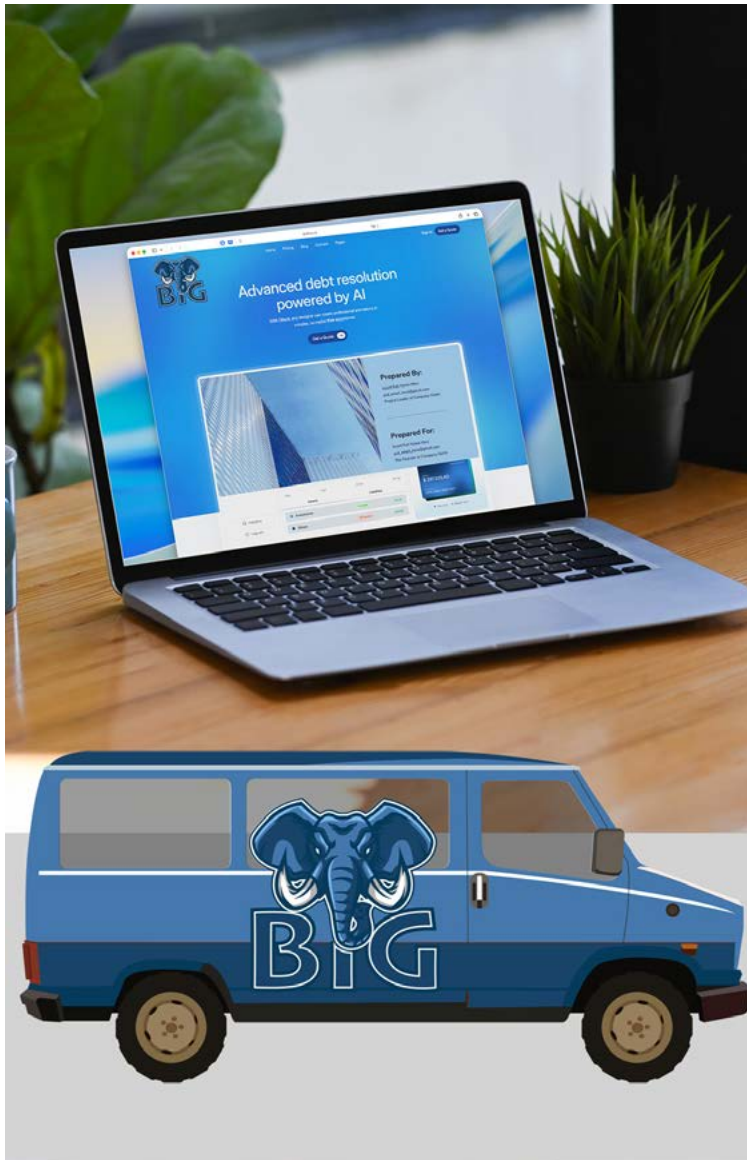
You'll notice inconsistent logo images, all on a theme, but changed over time.

Templates have been used for website, brochure and proposal etc., with no universal consistency.

Ignoring the outdated (or rubbish) design, the lack of a colour theme and overall branding structure is an obvious sign of a small or unprofessional company.







BIG

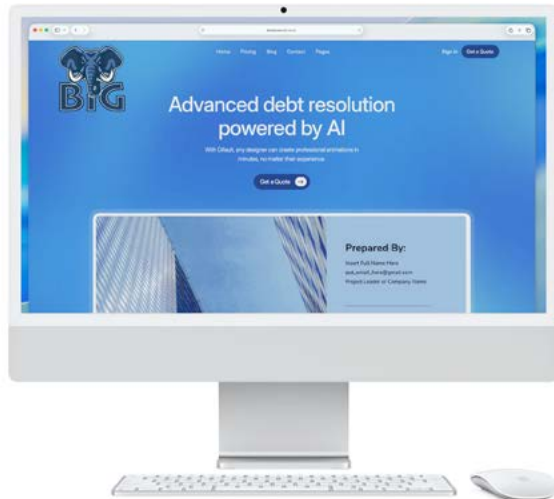
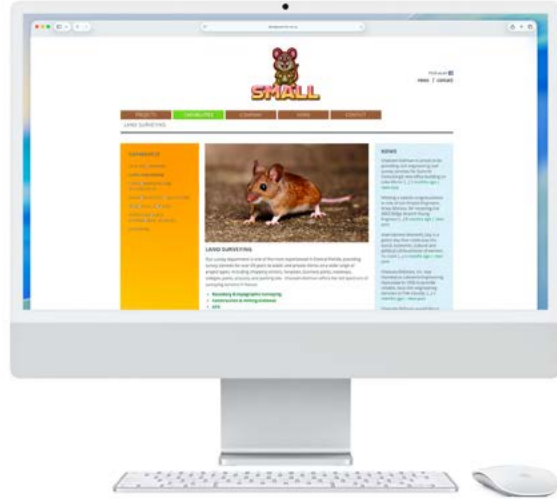
It's immediately obvious that this company has been professionally branded. To the layperson, they're either a large national enterprise, a franchise or at least, very successful.

The consistency of the logo, colour theme and images serves to give this impression.

In reality, it's entirely possible that 'Small' and 'Big' are both the same companies with the same number of employees.

BUT WHICH ONE WOULD
YOU CHOSE TO SPEND YOUR
MONEY WITH?





Chapter 3: First Impressions Count

Customers form an opinion of a business long before they experience the product or service itself. That first impression is built entirely from appearance, and it happens fast, often in a matter of seconds. This chapter looks at where those first impressions actually happen, and why they matter more than most business owners realise.

How do potential customers come into first contact?

There are usually only a handful of touchpoints where a new customer first meets a business.



Website

For many businesses today, the website is the very first contact. Often accessed via a search engine, AI search or a shared link, it's seen long before any face-to-face interaction occurs.

Vehicle graphics

For trades and service businesses, a van or ute seen in a customer's street or a car park is frequently the first (and sometimes only) branding a prospective customer sees before deciding whether to call.

Advertisements / social media

Whether an old-fashioned print ad or a social media post, this is often the first picture a new customer has of your company. In the case of social media, your advertisement may even display after those of your competitors. (You know how it is: you click on an ad for a house washer, and for the next week, you're inundated with ads for house washers)! How will your house-washing advertisement stand up?)

Salesperson and/or business card

In more direct sales environments, the first contact is a person: their presentation, their card, and the material they hand over all form part of the customer's first read on the business. NOTE: this first contact is almost always backed up by a visit to the company website, if only for affirmation.

And what is their opinion of your company upon first contact?

Within seconds, a potential customer will have made an unconscious judgement about whether this business appears capable, trustworthy, and professional – or a gamble. That judgement happens well before any conversation about price, quality, or service can take place, and it colours everything that follows.

Clothes maketh the man

Appearance does a disproportionate amount of the persuading, for better or worse.



Good design is not always obvious, but bad design is (even if the observer isn't sure why they're repelled by it)

When branding and design are done well, customers rarely stop to notice or comment on it – it simply feels right, and their attention moves straight to the product or offer.

When it's done badly, most people can't articulate exactly what's wrong, but they feel a vague sense of unease or distrust, and that feeling is often enough to send them elsewhere.

Large companies have paid \$\$ for professional design, while small companies often cut corners

This is precisely why large companies invest heavily in design: they know it removes a subconscious barrier between the customer and the sale. Small companies that cut corners here aren't just missing a nice-to-have; they're leaving a barrier in place that costs them customers who never say why they didn't call back.



A quick case study

Bill has been doing what he does for decades. He's fast, efficient and inexpensive. His regular customers love him.

Ben cuts corners and finds the cheapest parts he can. He has left a string of unsatisfied customers in his wake.

The economy is poor and business isn't what it used to be, so both Bill and Ben decide to market their businesses.

Bill still has the cheap, cobbled-together branding from when he started the business. Ben, on the other hand, paid for a professional branding job a few years ago, and his vans, premises, website and marketing material look amazing.

WHO DO YOU THINK WILL GET THE
BEST RESULT FROM THEIR MARKETING
CAMPAIGN?





Chapter 4: AI design: when to use it – and when **NOT** to use it

We're currently being bombarded with information and recommendations on how to use AI agents to reduce our workload and enhance our lives. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the broader field of design.

A massive shift is underway from paying professional designers to getting your design work for free from any one of the many AI tools now available. It's so pervasive that some designers, many with decades of experience, are shutting up shop and going surfing.

"See my new poster? I did it myself with AI!"

You would be forgiven for thinking that human design is dead, and AI is king.

But we're not there yet.



What's wrong with AI design?

AI cannot create; it cannot design from scratch. What AI does is trawl through billions of designs already on the internet and assemble what it deems appropriate for the prompt it receives. Unfortunately, the internet is more than 40 years old – as are the designs it stores. That's why the bulk of AI-designed posters, advertisements and logos look dated from the outset.

Ten to fifteen years ago, the '*paintbrush blaze on an angle*' was in vogue. You can still find numerous examples online. For some reason, AI has collectively decided that this design element is the key to modern layout.

Everyone knows an AI-designed poster or advertisement. There are not only the 'paintbrush' elements, but also the little graphics strewn across the design – the cutesy hearts and stars. But most of all, there is the complete lack of white space. All available real estate is filled up.



It's a size and budget thing

Nobody will ever judge the organiser of a school bake sale or the coach of a junior sports team for using AI to create their social media posts and window posters. In the years before AI, this output was either a Word document or a PowerPoint created by someone's 14-year-old daughter.

AI, Canva, and other tools now mean charities, not-for-profits, and cottage industries can produce decent output for nothing. It doesn't matter that 12 design rules have been broken, or that the design is almost identical to six others in the same social media feed. It's still better than a Word doc.

But imagine seeing a city billboard or a glossy brochure advertising the latest BMW sedan with little hand-drawn hearts and stars, crowded with details and no white space. Or a full-page ad for Patek Philippe watches in a glossy magazine – with paintbrush blazes. What would you think?

There is an obvious scale from 'free' designs to 'paid for' designs that reflects an organisation's professionalism.

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Embrace the ride, because every moment holds the power to change us.

Business start-ups

Nobody expects a brand-new business to spend thousands on branding when they're struggling to buy stock, tools, or machinery.

Here's an example:

JS Plumbing

John Smith is 25. He's finished his plumbing apprenticeship, has two years of qualification behind him, and has decided to go out on his own. He's borrowed money from dad, bought a van, and started a business: JS Plumbing.

His partner, Andrea, works in admin and has learned a little Canva. Andrea uses Canva and AI to design his logo and create the social media posts that advertise his business. After a few months, she uses a drag-and-drop builder to make John a website.

So far, so good. Customers can see that John is young and just starting out. Some will use him (for minor jobs) to help him get established. Many will not, as they prefer someone with more experience.

AJ Plumbing

Alan Jones formed his plumbing business 20 years ago. Now AJ Plumbing is the number one outfit in the region, with 12 vans, a flash new premises on a main street, and 1000 Google reviews (mostly great).

After two years in business, Alan paid a design studio to brand AJ Plumbing. Now his logo and colours are well-known among the public, and he continues to stick with the brand. Over the years, he's updated the brand, but kept to the basics so as not to confuse his customers.

Customers recognise that using AJ Plumbing is guaranteed to return a good job – if on the expensive side.

New customers seeking a plumber are subconsciously faced with a choice: save money and go to JS Plumbing, or guarantee a good result, but pay more at AJ Plumbing.



The price inference

The AI ads and amateur logo of JS Plumbing infer lower prices, while the professional branding of AJ Plumbing asserts a good result (for a higher cost).

Neither of these assumptions may be true. JS Plumbing may return a better result, or it may cost more, or AJ Plumbing might be cheaper. New customers don't know any of this.

But the branding – or lack of it – colours their first impression.

Customers associate professionalism with quality design

As mentioned already, seeing obvious AI (cheap) design advertising high-quality products like BMWs and Patek Philippe watches would be shocking and cause a disturbance in the force. But for a start-up business, it's acceptable – although its presence also advertises the very start-up nature of the business.

When start-ups become more established, it's advisable to engage a professional designer to update or replace your branding and lose that 'new business' patina.

NOTE: When a customer recognises AI design, their mind assigns the advertiser to one of three categories:

1. Amateur (not-for-profit, school charity, cottage industry etc.)
2. New business or sole-trader with no money to spend on advertising
3. A struggling established business (potentially about to shut down)

WHAT THEY DON'T THINK IS, 'THIS IS A SUCCESSFUL, WELL-ESTABLISHED ENTERPRISE THAT WILL GIVE ME EXACTLY WHAT I NEED'.





Chapter 5: What to Do About It

This is the practical heart of the book. Having covered why appearance matters and how the gap becomes visible, this chapter sets out exactly what to fix, in what order of importance, and how far a fix needs to go.

Brand your operation

It's not just a logo, it's a brand. Branding covers everything from colours, fonts, copy, and layout through to decisions such as vehicle choice, employee uniforms, and packaging style. Treating 'the brand' as a single joined-up system, rather than a pile of separate decisions made at different times by different people, is the single biggest shift most small businesses need to make.



NOTE: Just as potential customers can make snap decisions about a company based on its size, they can also be swayed by branding. There's a perception that branding is expensive – meaning a well-branded company is successful enough to have spent the money.

Your logo

Check your logo. Does it represent a professional organisation?

Look at your logo honestly, ideally next to a competitor's. Does it hold up at a small size, in a single colour, and printed on a sign or embroidered on a shirt? If it doesn't stand up to that scrutiny, it's worth addressing before anything else, since every other piece of branding builds on top of it.

The original logo can be updated; it doesn't have to be thrown out

Fixing a weak logo doesn't mean starting from zero and losing everything customers already recognise. In most cases, the core idea – a symbol, a

colour, a shape customers already associate with the business – can be refined and professionally redrawn while keeping that recognisable thread intact.

Website

Is it a template site like thousands of others? It doesn't cost a lot to be different

A generic template site isn't necessarily a bad website functionally, but if it's instantly recognisable as 'one of those' off-the-shelf templates, it undercuts everything else the business is trying to say about being established and professional. Differentiating a website doesn't require a huge budget. Custom colours, imagery, and layout tweaks applied thoughtfully can make a template feel bespoke.

A small animation, not possible with a cheap template site, can make a difference. Either animate the company logo or add something specific to the industry: for example, a plumbing website with a dripping tap not only differentiates the site but also attracts attention.



The originals



GRADIENTS
DROP SHADOWS



GRADIENTS
DROP SHADOWS
DATED FONT TREATMENTS
CLIP-ART



DATED FONT TREATMENTS
CLIP-ART
INCONSISTENT COLOURS
POOR CONTRAST



The updates



COLOUR RETAINED
FLATTENED OVAL SHAPE RETAINED



COLOUR RETAINED (BLACK-GREY)
GEAR SHAPE & SPANNER RETAINED

OPTION



COLOUR RETAINED
CENTRED IMAGE RETAINED

OPTION



ORIGINAL CLIPART IMAGE (UPDATED) RETAINED



See if you can work out which is the old and which is the new

Google! Google



Advertising/social media/flyers/business cards

Every piece of outward-facing material – ads, social posts, and business cards – should be treated as an extension of the same brand, not a series of one-off design jobs. Once the core branding is sorted, these smaller items become quick and cheap to produce correctly.



Consistency!

Colours and layout

The same colours (with exact codes, not 'roughly the same blue') and a consistent layout approach should appear everywhere the business shows up, from a shopfront sign to an Instagram post.

Copy and text used across all platforms

The words matter too. Maintaining the same tone, terminology, and key phrases across the website, social media, and printed materials reinforces a single, coherent identity rather than several slightly different ones.

Consistency #2

If your logo has been a yellow duck on a blue background for years, update the logo, but keep a visually obvious duck and roughly the same colours. Don't change your animal to a crocodile. Existing customers have built up recognition and trust in what you already have: a refresh should sharpen that recognition, not throw it away and start again from scratch.



Chapter 6: Staging

Fixing years of accumulated shortcuts doesn't have to happen all at once, and for most small businesses, it shouldn't. This chapter sets out a sensible order of operations, so the work – and the cost – can be spread out sensibly.

Large corporations carefully manage a rebrand, usually with a fixed date in mind. They then spend hundreds of thousands of dollars (sometimes millions) stage-managing the rebrand day. This means, for example, having multiple signmakers standing by at all branches and premises, then working through the night to swap out the signage ready for the morning.

Unfortunately, most of us don't have that kind of budget.



You don't have to do it all at once. The order of change should be:

A sensible rollout generally follows this sequence:

1. Brand and logo first
2. Social media output
3. The "free" updates, such as the logo on invoices and new email signatures
4. Business cards (cheap)
5. Website (a bit more pricey)
6. Business-specific visibility, such as shopfront or vehicle signage (most expensive changes)
7. The lesser changes like price cards, price books, brochures, and catalogues.

Working through the list in this order means every later step already uses the finished, correct branding, rather than needing to be redone. You will also notice that the cost tends to rise as the options progress, allowing for easier budgeting.

The price consideration

It costs a lot more to change a building sign than to print new business cards. Usually, the most expensive changes can be left until the end. This is partly to assist the budget, but also about sequencing: by the time you reach the costliest items, the brand has already been tested and refined across cheaper, faster-to-change material, so there's less risk of paying for a large sign and wanting to change it again soon after.

The advantages of a 'similar' brand refresh

Not everyone notices a small change, but new customers will see you in a different light

A refresh that keeps recognisable elements – like the duck, just redrawn properly – often goes unnoticed by long-standing customers as a big change, while brand-new customers simply see a business that looks established and professional from the very first contact.



You can more easily budget for a rollout over several months or longer if the change is a 'tidy-up' rather than a full upgrade

Because a refresh-style project is smaller in scope than a full rebrand, it's also easier to spread the cost over several months or longer, fitting the work around cash flow rather than requiring one large outlay up front.

A real job – the original



And the 'tidy-up' (Update)



Chapter 7: What else can you do?

When a monkey is faced with an approaching leopard, it stands as tall as it can and lifts its arm in the air. If there's a stick or a large object handy, it lifts that as high as it can as well. This is to appear bigger than it really is and (hopefully) frighten away the predator.

Small businesses can perform similar acts to foot it with the big boys.

'We'

If you're a one-person-does-all business, you're still a 'we', not an 'I'. Replace every example of singular on your website and in your marketing. Change '*I can make sure...*' or '*Just call me...*' to '*We make sure...*' or '*Call us...*'



It's a small change, and it's not being disingenuous. Maybe you sometimes have a helper? Or you might grow one day and take on an employee.

One day, when the business that shares your name has 100 employees and several branches, you can change things back to 'I'. Put your photograph on your website and tell your customers, "I guarantee that you'll receive the best service in town", or words to that effect.

Customer contact

Calling very large companies is annoying. You end up with 'If you know the extension...' or 'Press 5 for...'. Or, worst of all, 'You're currently . . . 26th . . . in the queue...'

But tiny companies aren't much better. Cellphones go unanswered. There's no landline. Emails aren't acknowledged for hours.

If you want to appear larger than you are, ensure that every time someone contacts (or attempts to contact) you, they get a response. You might be a one-man or one-woman band, up a ladder or mowing a lawn, but make sure calls are answered.

You might have 10 employees, but Alex is sick, so there's nobody available to answer the phone.

Investigate using an answering service. There are some amazing AI-driven services available these days. For emails, at least set up an autoresponder and be notified when an email arrives.

You're busy, but not *that* busy

Like the customer contact question, this is as much a part of good customer service as it is appearing larger, but it's still vital.

Very large companies often have a booking service, and customers know they'll have to wait for an appointment or service. On the other hand, tiny companies can be like small yappy dogs: 'Sure, sure, when do you want it? I can be there in 20 minutes!'

The customer needs to know that, while they're special, they're not your only customer. Bigger companies have an efficient system of dealing with orders or requests that offer a prompt response, without displaying desperation. It doesn't take much effort to emulate those systems.





Chapter 8: DesignWarrior

Everything covered in this book – logo refinement, consistent branding, professional websites, and a staged rollout that fits your budget – is exactly what DesignWarrior does for small and medium businesses every day.

What we offer

DesignWarrior provides the full range of services covered in this book: logo design and refinement, brand guideline documents ('branding books'), consistent design across signage, vehicles, business cards, and packaging, and professional website design. Rather than treating each as a separate job with a separate supplier, DesignWarrior manages them as a single, coordinated brand: the same approach used by the large companies discussed earlier in this book, but applied to a small-business budget.



Pricing and budget

Design work doesn't have to mean a single enormous invoice. Following the staged approach outlined in the previous chapter, DesignWarrior can scope a project to match your budget and timeline, starting with the highest-impact, lowest-cost items first, and spacing out the larger investments as cash flow allows.

*This DesignWarrior publication is part of **The Business of Design** series that has been put together with the goal of bringing professional design back to the forefront of business thinking.*

The proliferation of AI-sourced logos, brochures, websites, vehicle graphics and other imagery has diluted the true strength of the professional brand.

*The fact is, large, professional companies **do not** resort to AI and drag-and-drop methodology. And these 'shortcuts' are obvious to most people – even if they don't know why.*

If you want to know more, or would just like to discuss your options, contact DesignWarrior.

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APPEARANCE MATTERS

How to foot it with the big boys!

GARY CRILLEY

Many small businesses and sole traders struggle to compete with larger companies, partly because customers often associate size with greater professionalism – and, in turn, better service and value.

They look for signs that signal a company's size, attitude and implied professionalism, without realising it. They just 'know' this company's a good one.

Conversely, they recognise a small business through the same subliminal cues.

Imagine this: a company advertises 'attention to detail' but has an obvious spelling mistake in their text.

*Or this: a potential customer receives a business card, but the text is so small that the contact details are illegible.**

**Both of these actually happened!*

Fortunately, small businesses can make an impressive first impression that rivals that of much larger firms. It's not difficult, and this book shows you how.

www.designwarrior.co.nz

www.inthebush.co.nz

