

# From pencil to PDF

To be a good designer you need to be curious about life; the strongest ideas are born from our experiences and the knowledge we gain from them. The more we see and the more we know, the greater the amount of fuel we have for generating ideas.

I'm often asked how to transform this fuel into actual design concepts, and that's what we're going to look at in this chapter. We'll focus on two vital steps in the process—mind mapping and sketching—and then talk about what to include when preparing your presentation PDFs for the client.

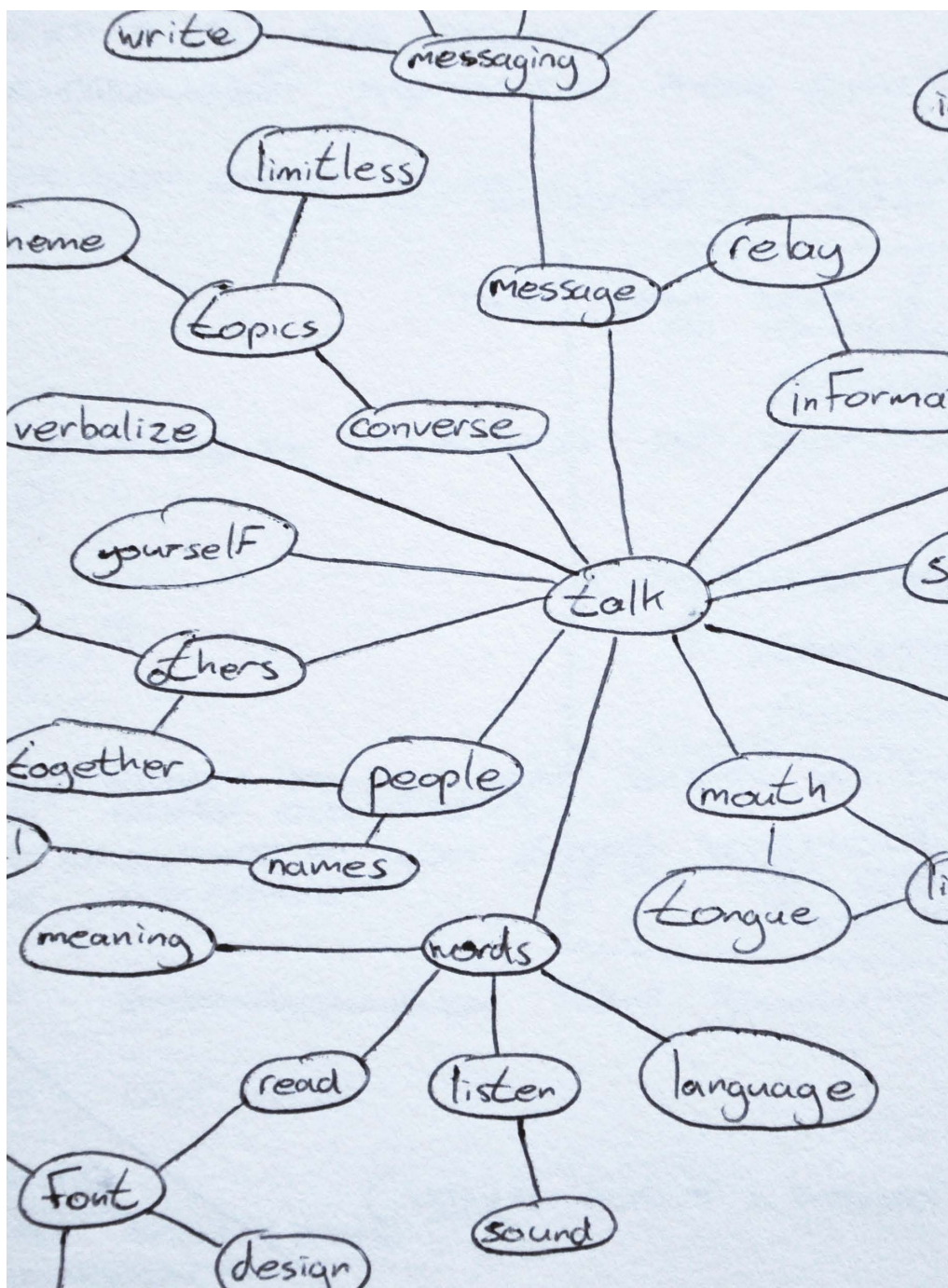
## Mind mapping

Using mind maps helps you to consider as many different design directions as possible, and at the stage when they're most needed. It's a relatively straightforward process of word association. You write a word that's central to the design brief, and then branch out from it, writing other words that spring to mind. These additional words could come after some thought or after researching the central topic. The idea is to form as large a “thought cloud” as possible, giving you a tool to refer to when it comes to the next stage—sketching.

Mind mapping is particularly useful in the design profession because it's very effective for working through these steps in the design process:

- Collecting your thoughts
- Generating ideas
- Getting into a creative flow
- Associating words with images and symbols

I've been using mind maps for as long as I've been studying design. It's nothing new, and it can seem a bit basic. But design isn't rocket science, and this is a tried and tested practice that works well. Other designers often ask me to go into more detail on the intricacies of mind mapping, so let's take a look at a few examples.







Once the map is complete, I'll make a separate note of the key words, which helps me to focus on the most suitable connections.

A complex mind map centered on 'WARDROBE'. The main branches include:

- SHIRT**: TIE, SMOOTH, COLLAR, CUFF, LINKS, QUALITY, HAT, TAILORED, SHAPE, FIGURE, MALE, XY, GENETICS.
- WOOL**: DIAMOND, PRECIOUS, TOUGH, LEATHER, KNOT, LIGHT, LACES, LINE, SOCKS, SEW, KNITWEAR, FABRIC, SUPER, THIN, AMBASSADOR.
- SUITS**: SUIT, PATTERN, FORMAL, TROUSERS, LINING, MANUFACTURED, MOSCOW, HEADQUARTERED, UNIQUE, GEOGRAPHY, UZBEKISTAN, ORIGINATED, EXPENSIVE, ITALY, HANDMADE, LUXURIOUS, HISTORY, TIME, WATCH, LINE.
- SHOES**: SHOES, BROWN, BLACK, LINE, LACES, LIGHT, KNOT, LEATHER, TOUGH, DIAMOND, PRECIOUS.
- Other Attributes**: FITTED, BLAZER, DETAIL, SUBTLE, ORIGINATED, UZBEKISTAN, GEOGRAPHY.

I started this particular mind map using “suit” as the key, placing each connector in a separate “bubble” before branching into all the words I could associate with the preceding word. This helps move my imagination in directions I mightn’t otherwise go. If I get stuck, I go back to the design brief and pick another important word, add it to the map, then search for connections. A thesaurus can also help kickstart the process when you draw a blank.

**ADB mind map  
(opposite)**  
2011

Turning the map into actual shapes and symbols and patterns is fairly straightforward. For instance, some of the words in this one include thread, laces, line, and circle. Brown and black are in there, too, as a quick color prompt.

I usually spend at least a couple of days of each project mapping word associations. I find that the two-day allotment gives me at least one night to sleep on any ideas, which can help. Gaining some distance from the project at night is productive, as is a rested mind.

Once you have a thorough map on paper, you can use it as the cornerstone of the next step.

## The necessity of the sketchpad

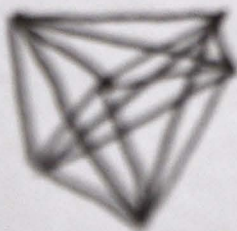
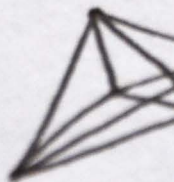
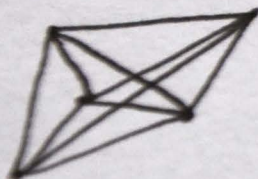
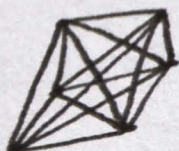
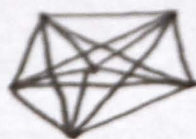
There are a lot of subpar design courses out there. As a result, many aspiring designers see computers as the only truly necessary tool. But on the contrary, by removing the computer from how you create, you gain much more freedom when translating your thoughts.

You learned to draw before you learned how to use a computer. Why? Because it's easier. It's less restricting. And it's more creative. You want a circle here? A stroke there? No problem. Just do it. Translating the same process to a computer requires unnecessary steps that hinder your creative flow.

Think of the sketchpad as your conceptual playground—a tangible scene where an idea can be batted around and subjected to the immediacy of uncensored thoughts. Random ideas collide with intention. Suggestions are made. Some stick. Others are thrown out. Eventually your idea develops structure, and only then do you need to use a computer.

It's vital to keep an open mind and not limit yourself when sketching. Even if your ideas seem too far-fetched, it's best to make a visual note of every thought that crosses your mind.

Remember, too, that your drawing skills aren't important. What is important is that you produce as many ideas as possible before turning to your computer. Your mind map gives you access to the most important thoughts you can associate with the company you've been hired to identify. Sketch based on a single thought. Merge two together. Combine a group. There should be a huge array of possibilities.







# CampusIT

Managing  
Student  
Interactions

Creating new jobs in a €1.2M investment drive

ZANGARI

Let's look at a few examples where the use of a pencil has led to effective results.

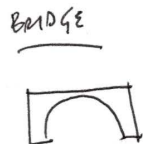
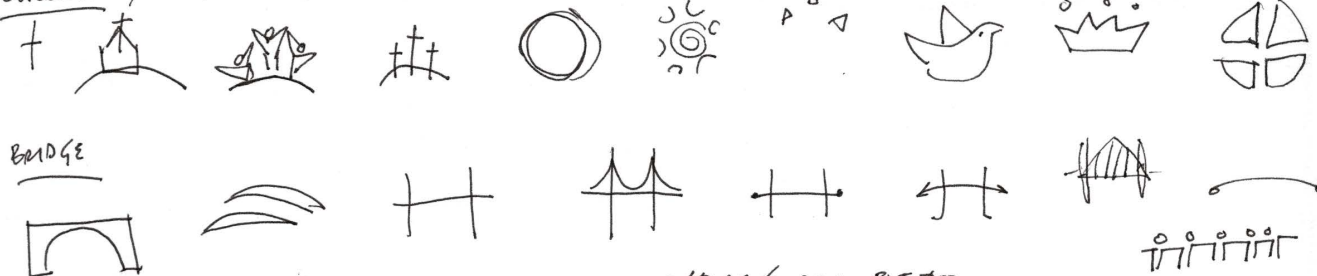
Designer Nancy Wu was hired to create a logo and collateral for Tenth Avenue Alliance Church in Vancouver, British Columbia (popularly known as just “Tenth Church”). Nancy’s clever result was born from these sketches.

"We took our time to get it right and spread the project work out over seven and a half months. The actual amount of time taken was likely half of that."

Nancy Wu





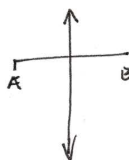


CROSS → GIVER  
→ CHRIST  
→ BIBLE

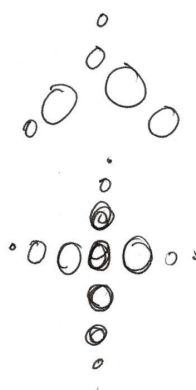
Specifically  
says these

CROSS ITSELF IS A BRIDGE

CULTURE/MOSAIC - BIT TOO  
MULTICULTURAL?



TOO FEMININE



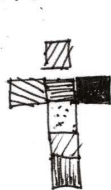
BEEN DONE  
LOTS FOR CHURCH  
+ CORPORATIONS.



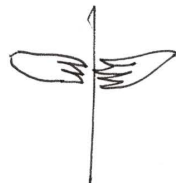
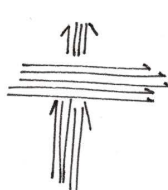
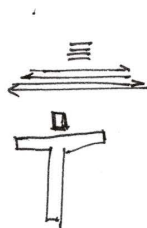
STYLIZED T /  
ABOUT A T-SHIRT?



MOSAIC CROSS -  
DIFFERENT COLORED BOXES?



4c  
VERSION

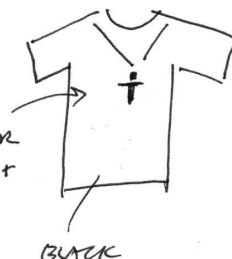


CROSS OUT OF  
SOUND WAVES  
- FORM OF  
RANGING OUT?

IDEA?  
WITH SILHOUETTES OF  
PEOPLE - ALWAYS CHANGE  
TO SUGGEST DIVERSITY?  
ALWAYS ABOUT PEOPLE  
CONNECTING, COMMUNING,  
PHYSICAL BRIDGE +  
CROSS.  
D.F. GOES SAY MOSAIC?



SILVER  
LOGO +  
UNES  
(MORE  
OPPOSITE  
THAN WHITE?)



IDEA FOR TENTH ARE  
T-SHIRTS - LOOK LIKE  
YOU'RE WEARING A  
CROSS NECKTIE



?

← NOT ENOUGH T



hidden t?

tree?

Tenth





TENTH  
CHURCH  
MT PLEASANT



BINARY - GROWTH  
PATTERN

- CROSS
- PEOPLE
- T = TENTH, TRUTH
- COMMUNITY
- OPEN ARMS - ACCESSIBLE



MOSAIC - CROSS - TRANSFORMATION  
- LOWER CASE t  
- CROSS SECTION OF PEOPLE  
- COMMUNION + COMMUNITY  
- POINT OF VIEW

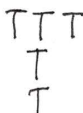


- COVERAGE  
- PASTICHE OF PEOPLE SYMBOLIZED  
BY TYPOGRAPHY / COVER WITH DIVERSITY

tenth

← SUBTLE CROSS IN SIMPLE DIRECT TYPE

?  
IF HIGHLIGHTED IN COLOR, TOO OBVIOUS?  
GROW? TOO SUBTLE IT GETS LOST?



BEEN DONE.



FEEL?  
LOOK?



← t / CROSS SHAPED  
MADE OF COLORED DOTS  
(MOSAIC / COMMUNITY -  
FASTER READ THAN CIRCLE)

← NOT SO TIGHTLY PACKED / HARD.



DIAGONAL

← TOO  
OVERSQUARE.

TENTH CHURCH



WEARABLE  
BUTTONS



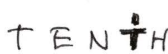
EMBROIDERED, SCREENPRINT,  
POWERPOINT, T-SHIRT.



POSTER



ARONE



WORDMARK

SHOWN



- SPARK - POWER  
- CONNECTIONS



FOLD UP / MODULAR?



thin?



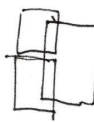
SHAPE?

too small  
more

CIRCLE - UNITS  
WHOLE



10



LAYING?

tenth

tenth

tenth

tenth

tenth

look

Church officials wanted a refreshed identity that avoided stylistic trends, clichés, and traditional cues that speak of the past, versus what the church is accomplishing today. They wanted the design to represent human emotion and vitality, and reflect the virtues of being down-to-earth, welcoming, and authentic.

---

### **Tenth Church**

By Nancy Wu, 2008



At first glance, the logo is deceptively simple. But a lot of behind-the-scenes effort goes into every successful identity project.

“The effectiveness as a mark was apparent on launch day, in watching how church members and visitors reacted to it,” said Nancy. “It was accessible, and people understood it instinctively.”

The simple wordmark incorporates a graphic icon with the multiple ideas of worship, welcome, transformation, outreach, and the cross.

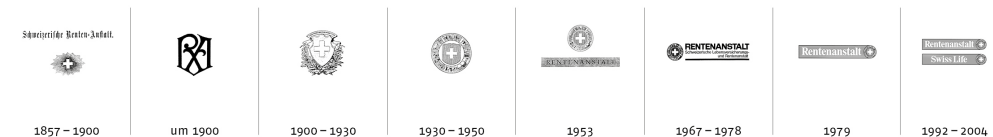
Deliverables included the logo, stationery, a bulletin and Microsoft PowerPoint template, a graphic standards guide, promotional buttons, mugs, water bottles, t-shirts, and tote bags.





## Defining insurance

Swiss Life is the oldest life insurance provider in Switzerland. The company was in financial crisis when managers approached MetaDesign in need of a modernized brand. It needed to send a clear signal that the company was fit for the future.



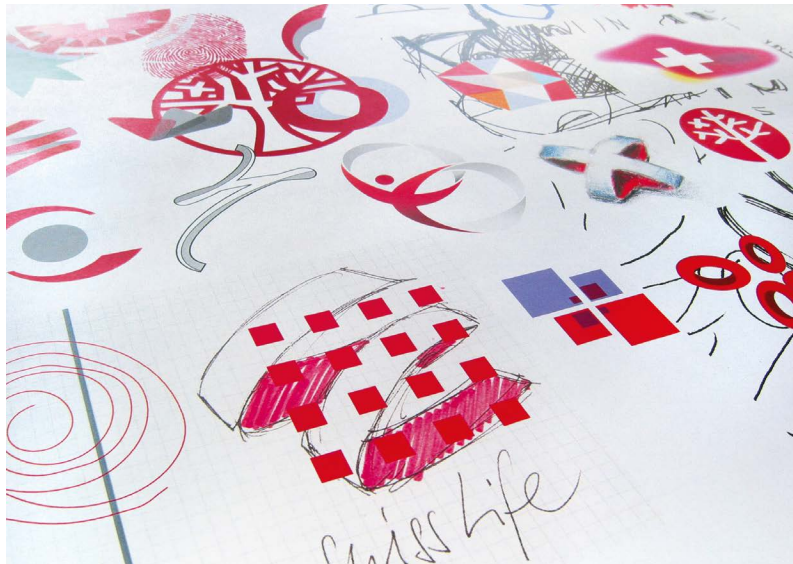
Swiss Life logo  
timeline  
1857–2004

According to MetaDesign's CEO and managing partner Alex Haldemann, this was much more than a design process: "It was an incredible catalyst for internal and external change."

MetaDesign challenges its clients by taking them further than where they may be comfortable. "We often have to encourage them to let go of their traditional brand assets," said Alex. "In the case of Swiss Life the client felt very uncomfortable at first, but it was our job as external advisors to make them feel this way because they needed to let go of their old identity in order to achieve their strategic goals."

By MetaDesign

By MetaDesign



“That said, you also have to know when to rein in. It helps as a starting point to show ideas from evolution to revolution. So the first design might be very close to what they know and simply an improvement, but then the second and the third go further until you see a real departure.”

## Sketches in digital form

"The concepts of the brand identity we design are never a formal execution—rather, we develop a story or concept and try to visualize it. With Swiss Life, the idea of the hand is that the lines tell an individual story." Alex Haldemann





Swiss Life's strong presence in several countries gave the project more complexity. A relevant factor that made MetaDesign's process and presentation a success was how the agency made sure to include decision-makers from all over the world. So instead of the identity being presented as a mandate from headquarters at the end of the process, the decision-makers in various markets were made part of the journey.





## Internationally recognized

La Internacional, an independent drugstore in San Francisco, specializes in natural medicine products. Well aware that its name didn't begin to describe the type or range of products and services available, the management asked studio1500, a California-based graphic design firm, to create a mark that clearly communicated the store's focus on natural medicine.

Here are some of the sketches that studio1500 partner and creative director Julio Martínez produced.

## La Internacional sketches

By studio1500



studio1500 presented three options to the client, with this customized “i” symbol chosen as the final design. The incorporation of a pill clearly suggests “drugstore,” with the green circle emphasizing the natural aspect of the product line.

---

#### **La Internacional**

By studio1500, 2008

Partner and creative  
director: Julio Martínez



Keep in mind that a logo doesn’t need to reflect in a literal way what your client’s business is about. But when it does, and especially when it manages to do so without hitting you over the head with the idea, it can definitely be a winner.

## **No set time**

The first idea you sketch for a client is unlikely to be the one that gets chosen. But sometimes, whether through sheer luck or if you’re especially tuned into your client’s design needs, that’s exactly what can happen.

studio1500’s Julio Martínez produced this symbol within minutes of sitting down at the drawing table for Elemental8, an industrial design studio in San Jose, California.

---

#### **Elemental8**

By studio1500, 2008



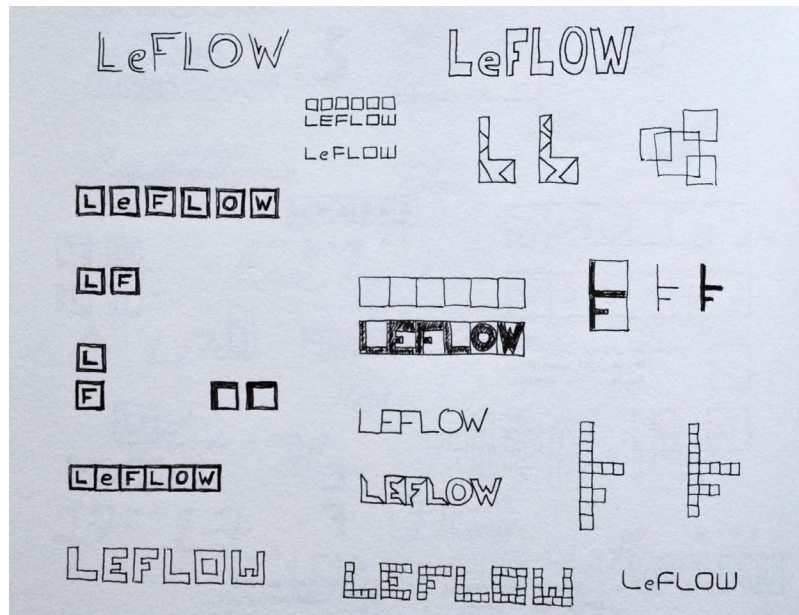
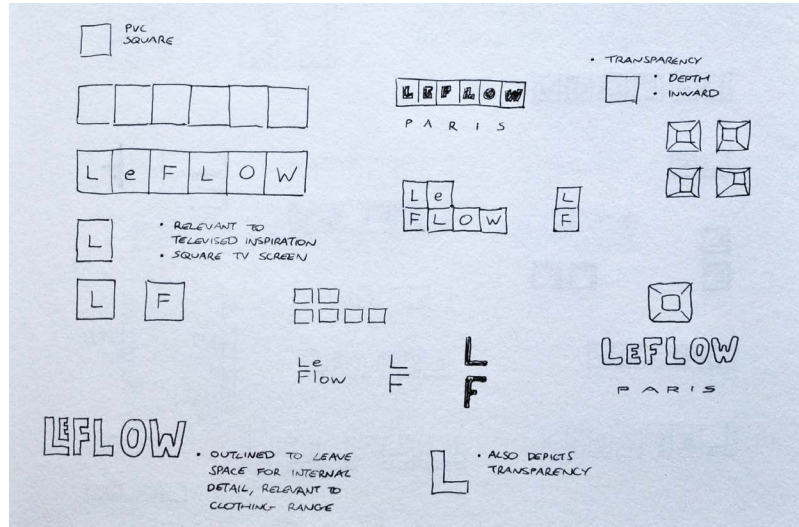
Think about the words that would've appeared in a mind map for this client. "Eight" is one of the most obvious. And "two," for the studio's partners. Put those together with a little sketching, and you've created two circles, one above the other.

96



In a similar example, I worked with French fashion designer Lionel Le Floch to create the visual identity for his high-end fashion brand LeFLOW. Although I created many more initial sketches than I've shown here, the idea that was ultimately chosen was formed from the first marks I put on paper.

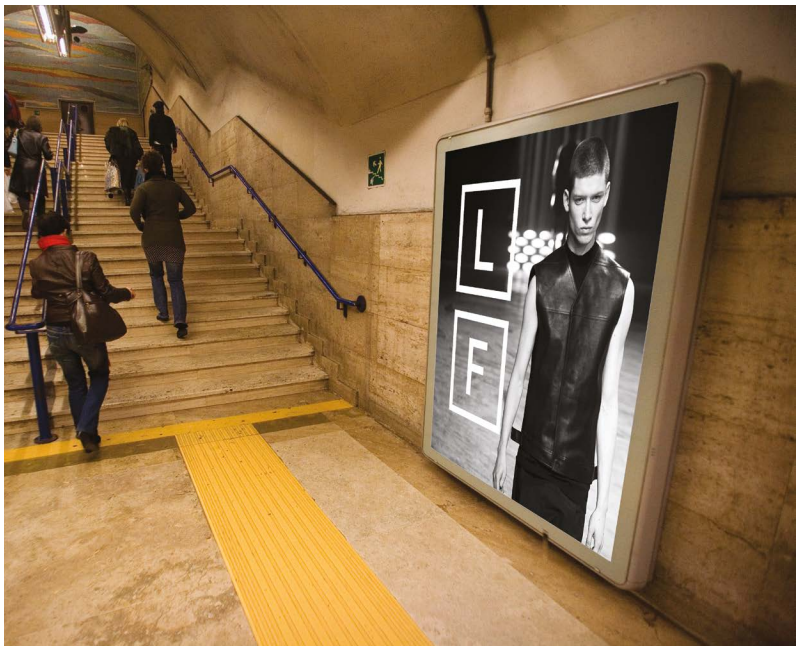
LeFLOW sketches  
2013



LE  
FLOW



When you break it down, the identity design process is relatively straightforward, albeit constructed by a number of small steps, each playing an important role.



## Too many ideas

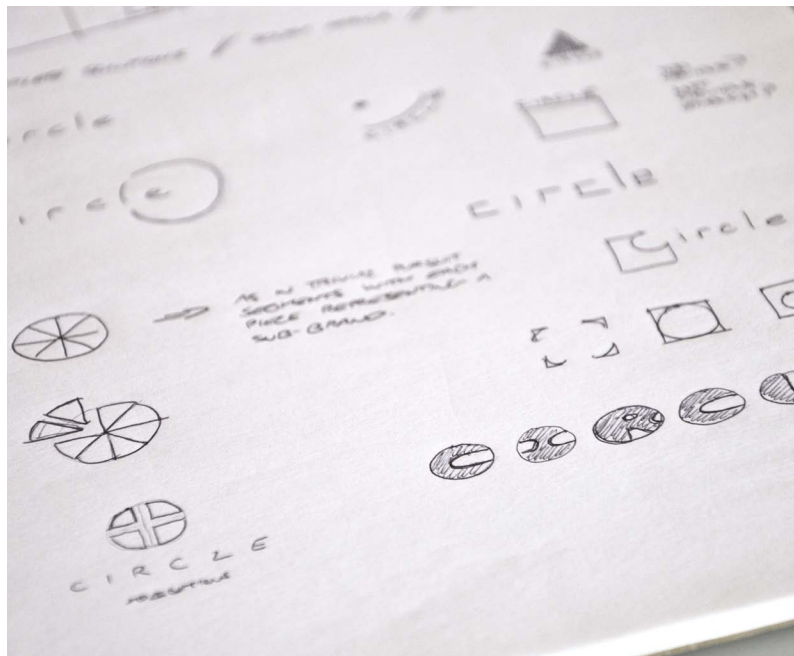
One of my first projects in self-employment was to create a logo for a South African web hosting company called Circle. In my eagerness to please, and when my initial ideas weren't accepted, I suggested that I publish a blog post showing all my sketches, inviting readers to share their thoughts. I was at a stage in learning where I didn't understand the downsides of such a maneuver.

- It's never a good move showing all of your ideas. There'll inevitably be poor ones in the mix, and lest we forget the influence of Murphy's Law, where if you show a client ten ideas—nine good, one bad—the chance of the bad idea being picked is greater than one in ten.
- When you present your client with too many options, the task of choosing becomes much more difficult—choosing one from two is easier than choosing one from 50.
- Inviting the general public to pass judgment disregards both your client's target audience, and whether or not those commenting have any notable design experience. When your client is able to read the comments, it throws a further spanner in the works.

---

### Circle sketches

Just a few of the hundred or so rough ideas I shared with my client.



Any one of my mistakes would be enough to hinder a project's completion, let alone all three combined.

I never did finish that project.

Once you've come up with several strong design possibilities, render them in presentational PDFs or slideshows. Nowadays, I prefer to document my work in a PDF file, even if my presentation is in person. PDFs are helpful because the layout and formatting of the content is fixed—that is, it won't change, regardless of the software the client uses to view it.

Don't include any designs you think might be unsuitable, or you'll risk diluting the quality of your good ideas with the lesser ones. Including options that you're unsure of also introduces the possibility that your client will choose the weaker candidate among a group of otherwise great ideas.

## Form before color

Let's look at an example where only the most appropriate ideas were presented.

160over90, a branding agency headquartered in Philadelphia, was given the task of rebranding the Woodmere Art Museum, which houses what it calls a “rich, three-centuries-and-counting legacy that includes American art from before we officially became America.”

Part of the project was the logo, and as is good practice, the designers first worked up a series of sketches before presenting the three strongest options to Woodmere—the signature, the perspective, and the monogram. The agency's standard process is to initially present designs only in black and white, since its designers have found that color biases a client's ability to focus on the form and ideas that the designs communicate.

---

The signature





---

### The perspective



---

### The monogram



Woodmere chose an evolved variation of the monogram option, with its simple graphic shapes that emphasize dimension and connection. With this design, 16Over90 created solid graphic forms that feel classical but turn into pieces of modern identity architecture that can easily form patterns and hold imagery. It wasn't until the client was firmly leaning toward using the monogram that the designers rendered it in color.

---

### Woodmere Art Museum

Chosen design,  
by 16Over90, 2008



Leaving color until near the end can be good because it's a detail that is much easier to change than the overall idea. And the last thing you want is for your client to be turned off an effective idea simply because he doesn't like the palette.

That said, if you choose to show color when sharing a few different ideas, try using the same palette for each design to avoid client bias on the basis of color alone.

## The value of context

Showing your designs in context—in other words, as they're more likely to be seen by others—is key to helping your client visualize how great you can make the company look. It's comparable to buying a car. The car might be shimmering under showroom lights, and have that “new car smell,” but you'll still want a test drive before buying. That's why showing an identity in context can be what finally gains consensus with your client.

Using Illustrator and Photoshop to incorporate your designs on vehicles, building signage, billboard space, stationery mockups, and so on, can augment the PDFs of your strongest ideas for your presentation to the client. The more relevant variety you create, the more cohesive the usage becomes, and the more attractive the outcome will appear.

London-based designer Andrew Sabatier used Photoshop to great effect when creating these conceptual mockups. He was brought on board by Siegel+Gale to rebrand Dubai Events Holding, a company responsible for enhancing Dubai as an event destination.





## By Dubai mockups

By Andrew Sabatier,  
2008

Agency: Siegel+Gale

Creative director:  
Lesley Perez

"In the creative process I usually find ideas that lend themselves to generating material for the brand. Once an idea is identified it's a case of working through the idea to demonstrate its value to the business. It's more about knowing when enough of the potential of the idea has been demonstrated and when to stop generating material to make the point."  
Andrew Sabatier



هن دبي by Dubai



Most clients won't have time to concern themselves with every step in the design process. They'll be focused on the end result, so the more tangible your concepts appear, the more the client will be able to visualize the benefits.

As much as we like to think otherwise, books are judged by their covers, so it's always good to make sure your identity presentations look the part.

Quick tip—include the date in the filename when saving your PDF files, since there might be some back-and-forth with your client. Seeing the date in the filename helps with version control and ensures you and your client are looking at the same document if talking things through on a call.

## **The pen is mightier than the mouse**

We've looked at what happens up to the point of the initial client presentation. You've put a lot of hard work into mind mapping, sketching your ideas, and including only the best options in your presentation. The PDF is complete and ready for the client to evaluate.

To recap the main points of this chapter:

- Mind mapping helps you consider as many different design directions as possible.
- Even the most simplistic designs are helped by an extensive sketching session.
- A pen or pencil offers much more control and creative freedom than a computer mouse, so leave the computer until your ideas are in place.
- Don't worry if you think you can't draw, because what's important is that you document your ideas so that you can either build upon them or rule them out.
- Don't be tempted to show a client all of your sketches, because there will undoubtedly be directions you don't want to pursue, and it would be most unfortunate if the client chose one of those directions.
- Make sure your PDFs help the client focus on the idea and not on an easily changed aspect like color.
- As much as we like to think otherwise, books are judged by their covers, so keep your identity presentations looking professional to retain client focus.



At this stage of the process, you might consider the job nearly complete, but don't forget you still need to present your ideas to the client. That's where we're headed next.



*The process of design*

Save up to 40% by ordering through the  
bookstore links here:

[www.logodesignlovebook.com/buy](http://www.logodesignlovebook.com/buy)

---

***Written by David Airey***

[www.davidairey.com](http://www.davidairey.com)

[www.logodesignlove.com](http://www.logodesignlove.com)

[www.identitydesigned.com](http://www.identitydesigned.com)