



The Business Identity Crisis

We recently changed our name, and in the process I learned a number of things that seem to be worth sharing.

For the record, we are now "BEACON Small Business Solutions"; as you can tell from our ad at the bottom of this page. Much of what follows discusses how this ad came to be, and how you can use this knowledge when you consider changing your business name and identity.

The Name

Many small businesses begin their name with the letter "A", or even a series of A's—"AAA Something." The idea is to capture the first listing in the Yellow Pages, which of necessity must be alphabetized.

We wanted something more descriptive, however, and one of my favorites was "Palmetto Small Business Solutions". My thought was of course to play off our South Carolina citizenship. And I thought we could have a really neat palm tree logo.

However, our design group overruled The Palmetto on the grounds that lots of businesses exist that use the Palmetto, and we were told to keep looking.

We'll be moving to the Baxter community later this year, so "Baxter Small Business Solutions" quickly became another candidate. This name was also discarded on the grounds that we have and will continue to serve more communities than Baxter.

We have a close-knit and usually informal office, and most of us kick off our shoes, because we're in front of computers most of the time. If we were at the Beach, I'd be tempted to call us "The Barefoot Accountants", but that name is just too whimsical for an organization that makes its way by convincing people to trust us with their financial and tax records, concerns, and dreams.

We selected "Beacon Small Business Solutions" because we wanted a lighthouse theme. We can be a safe passage through rough waters, and route to safe harbors. The Tax Code even has concepts called Safe Harbor legislation.

The Logo

So the design group was given a mission: create a lighthouse logo for us. They immediately said, "We'll do it, but we don't want to, and you won't like it."

So now we're down to one of the key things I learned in this journey, and which I want to share with you.

Lighthouses—or any other easily recognizable image—are no longer cutting edge. They are outdated. They make you look like you just got your first edition of Desktop Publishing software, and pulled something out of a clipart file.

To be honest, that image is precisely what I thought I wanted, but was I ever wrong!

The design group came back with several variations of attractive lighthouses. They also provided variations of more abstract "beacon" themes.

The theme we chose, which you see in our ad, is a very abstract representation, not even of a lighthouse, but of the light beam emanating from the lighthouse.

Its very abstraction makes it unique to us, and it seems to combine power and grace within a very clean and compact design.

You see this abstraction concept in large companies that heavily emphasize marketing concepts.

Think of the logos of Wachovia, Bank of America, and First Citizens Bank. The combination of color and design clearly say who these organizations are.

Early Responses

I would not have believed any of the above had I not experienced it myself. I had to be shown—they had to put my lighthouse idea up against the light beams.

When I saw what they were talking about, I immediately recognized the superiority of the light beams.

I have showed the designs to about 40 people I like and whose judgment I trust, and the response has been about 10 to 1 in favor of the light beams.

We're not fixing the design in stone just yet. Thanks to the miracle of digital printing, we have the luxury of printing small numbers of business cards and other documents until we feel we've got it right.

What You Can Do

Start Looking. What names and designs catch your eye? Why?

Be Open-Minded. My lighthouse probably would not have been a winner.

You're Choosing for the Future. You're not going to want to change your name and look too many times, so select something you will feel good about for a long time.

Simpler is Better. Don't try to say too much with your name or your logo.

Get Professional Guidance. This area has many people and organizations who produce quality work. Our design group is Pure Creative, of Rock Hill.