Minimalist branding - A guide

The current ongoing trend in marketing, minimalist branding has been trending for a few years. According to the grapevine, this trend will speed up and overtake the detailed and gratuitous marketing. Subtle, sleek and crafted with care, minimalism is more complicated than detailed.

This trend stresses the use of intellectual and psychological abilities of marketers instead of design skills. Also, aptly called 'more from less', minimalist branding used very little variety of colors and images to get the message across.

Minimalism is already clear in the simple landing pages, ads and Instagram. For many businesses, it is a combination of digital and physical. However, for business who stick to a single channel, minimalism is as important.

Though simple and 'more from less', minimalism takes a lot more understanding of the brand, its objectives, mission and vision to put in place.

In this thought-provoking article, let us look at some critical information on how minimalist branding can weave across digital and traditional assets to bring best results.

Minimalism explained

Minimalism has its roots in Japanese design. The Japanese Zen Monks practiced creating sand gardens with the 'yohaku-no-bi' technique, meaning "the beauty of blank space", to improve focus and concentration.

The minimalism movement has its roots in WWII and started just after in the art and music domains. Born out of reaction to the chaos of urbanity and excess of abstract expressionism, minimalism has since expanded beyond the founding ideologies. At core, minimalism is design at its most basic form. Removing excessive use of textures, shapes, colors and other design elements to address an intention or creation is the primary focus.

Architect [Ludwig Mies van der Rohe](#) probably pioneered minimalism, he was also the pioneer of modernistic architecture who believed in 'less from more'.

This picture depicts architecture of a Ludwig Mies van der Rohe design from over 70 years ago. It is under construction after 50 years of the architect's death at Indiana University in the USA,

Minimalism emphasizes on exacting focus using a cohesive and unified framework like the building above. The aim is to turn the focus on the product or service, subtly, by calming the mind and enhancing concentration. Do not mistake minimalism to be an art of bringing focus to an image or product with a dark background. No, it is the art of bringing focus and intent by removing all redundant elements.

A minimalist brand expounds the business personality clearly. Creating a new brand or rebranding with a minimalist approach requires brainstorming with all stakeholders in the business. Analytics on customers and present marketing practices are critical elements to consider while working towards a decision.

Minimalism is holistic

Just having a minimalistic design on your brand is not enough. The minimalism should come through in all imagery, content, design and all other digital and traditional elements used to create collaterals, ads or websites. Clean imagery, to-the-point text and lots of negative space are mandatory to create the required minimalist brand. Remember, minimalism doesn't work half way.

For digital businesses, holistic minimalism is critical. The website design, the content, the blog, social media platforms, and all branded ads that go through the gate should have consistent branding. For traditional business too, all collaterals need to send the same message to the world.

Minimalism is all aspects of business is demanding and creating and continuing the process is handwork. However, over time, when your brand grows, it would be a very satisfying experience to see it occupy a special place.

Minimalist branding is highly elegant and pleasing to the eye. Any inconsistency in such branding, during any exercise, can disconcert to the eye.

Elements of minimalism

Minimalism is about decluttering. Just like the human mind that gets distressed when decluttered, your brand will come across as truthful, simple, trustworthy and focusses on products and services. Minimalism, believe me, is classic and timeless. Ask any fashion designer worth his or her salt and they will agree, even if they do not embrace it.

Minimalism is also about consistent simplicity that not only captures the viewer's attention, but keeps it too.

All of us keep a lot of unnecessary stuff at home because of our own internal needs. Maybe it is not such a bad thing, however, clutter is clutter, irrespective of the thousand reasons to keep them. Did you ever think to throw all that unnecessary stuff away and getting some clean breathing space?

Anyway, minimalism stands on four pillars:

- Less is more
- Negative space
- Colors, textures, contrast
- Visual consonance

a. Less is more

I was talking about home a few seconds ago, decluttering your brand does not make it bland. Can you imagine the happiness, when your friend comes home, sees all the declutters space and exclaims "man, it looks so clean…". What is your

feeling? So, when you keep what is necessary and discard the ret, that's minimalism for you.

Back to business. Minimalist branding would mean letting your products and services shine through by cutting across unnecessary elements in your logo, website, product design and everywhere else. This is not emptying the space. We require this to ensure that the focus is on relevant elements.

Such an exercise makes your brand look elegant, like your shiny home, and impresses eyeballs. Remember, you cannot just go minimalist by changing collaterals, someone should ingrain the concept into every element and aspect of your business.

b. Negative space

It is normal for a human eye to be drawn to an object that has space around it. For example, you can see a lot of photographs around homes that are frames with negative space around them.

So there is nothing negative about negative space. The absence of elements in a space is the negative space (designers jargon). Negative space makes minimalism powerful.
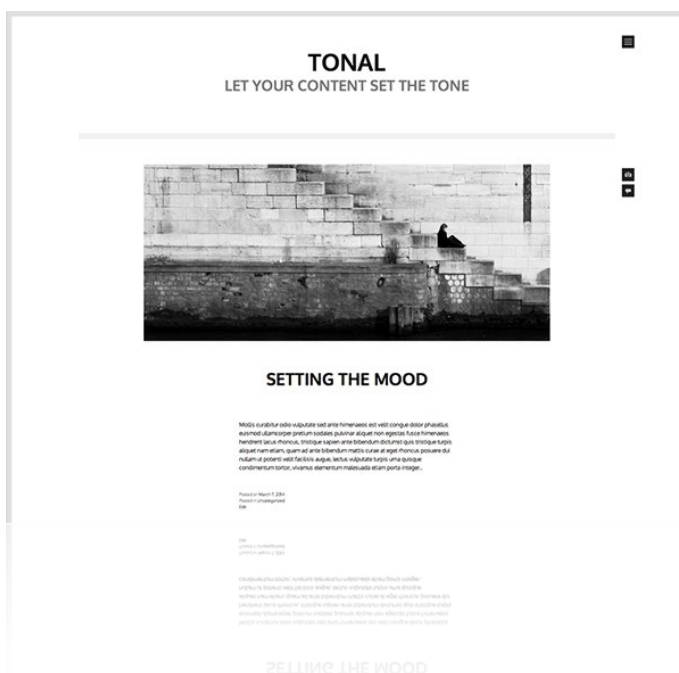
The above website template is a good example of website design. Presently, you will see different shades of gray on a wall and a human sitting on the stairs. Imagine, if the white background had a different color or assorted elements, you would have missed this entirely, especially the person sitting. This is creative use of negative space to help the viewer focus on what is important.

No wonder many businesses are adapting to minimalist branding to set consumer focus and grow.

c. Colors, textures, contrast

Minimalist branding does not mean black and white, with shades of gray. Use colors, but choose them wisely. High contrast and loud colors do not go with minimalist branding. Matching colors and tonal gradients will make your brand much more appealing.

Using same colors across collaterals but altering the textures can bring in better minimalist design with a variety.

Use low saturation colors, complementary colors and stick to 2 or 3 colors, no more. These are enough to achieve the desired minimalism by experimenting with placements.

d. Visual hierarchy and harmony

Visual hierarchy is the secret to bring viewer's focus to elements that you want them to focus on. It is the relationship between visual elements. Designer use grids to place elements and create a hierarchy. This helps them to use sizes and shapes to create the effect that they want.

Visual harmony is to create the correct relationship amongst all elements of a design to get the desired effect. This includes colors, pictures, typography and all other elements that are used in the design.

Visual hierarchy and harmony together create the symmetry and breathe life into minimalist branding.

Examples of minimalist branding

Most luxury brands are minimalist, however, minimalist branding can have other takers. Luxury brands use minimalist branding with a sense of finesse and not as a science. Let us look at some great examples of minimalist branding that most of us use, one digital and another traditional.

Google

Google's search page has forever been like this with minimal changes. Other search engines, like AltaVista and Yahoo, had too many attractive elements on their search pages. Think why Google has not only survived but thrived…
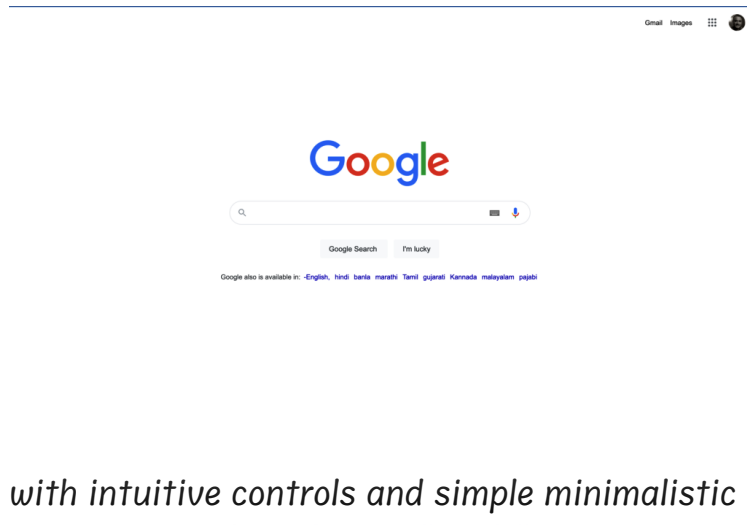
For google UX has always been a priority. All of Google's products like Maps, Gmail, AdSense and AdWords come with intuitive controls and simple minimalistic branding.

Apple

THE man that founded Apple, Steve Jobs was a minimalist himself. He followed Zen Buddhism, and it comes as no surprise that Apple's first ever brochure said "simplicity is the ultimate sophistication". Apple has always followed minimalist branding in its product design and marketing strategy.

In fact, all of Apple's products have minimum moving parts and revolve around the same philosophy of minimalist design. With circles and straight lines as the basic elements, apple has always advertised its simplicity even in iOS and other apps that it built.

Minimalist branding - Advantages and disadvantages

As we found minimalism on focus and concentration, it has the highest 'signal to noise' ratio. However, minimalist may not set the tome for all businesses.

Advantages

a. Classic design with timeless shelf-life

Minimalism is not new. Every wardrobe has the little black dress or the dinner jacket or an Oxford shirt tucked away for the occasion. It has been there for centuries and these classics never age or even if they do; they do so gracefully.

b. Better branding

Minimalist branding ensures brand recall because of the minimum elements it uses. With the absence of distractions and existing elements creating focus, it will be difficult to forget a minimalist brand.

c. User experience

Minimalism is about printing the minimum number of elements to the users to assimilate information quickly. This weeds out clutter and is definitely a better UX than most quirky designs that we see elsewhere.

Disadvantages

a. Not suited to everyone

A media website that needs to showcase news, videos, graphics and other text cannot be minimalist and it would defeat the purpose. All domains cannot integrate minimalist branding. It is wise to ponder and think through before you opt for minimalist branding.

b. Audience approval

If you already have a long running successful business, you will want to consider audience approval. Your target audience may not relate to minimalist branding and the entire exercise could fail. Analyze with market reports and data before you take the plunge into minimalism.

c. Negative space risk

Too much white space can be hard to handle. Yes, your design could go either way – elegant and classy, or tacky and bare–bones. And white space projects

everything. A minor mistake can be risky. Optimum use of white space is very essential to minimalist branding.

In Conclusion…

Minimalism is not a passing trend. It is a deeply ingrained philosophy because it is classic and timeless. Consistent simplicity is what you need to achieve from minimalist branding. Think Apple or Google.

There is no compulsion to adopt minimalism. It is your choice and a business decision. If you are opting for it, let us know how we can be of help.

Please share your thoughts in the comments section below.

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