

What is Mascot Design?

June 27, 2010



What makes characters mascots? How does one design a mascot? Since I work with these creatures I feel I should write a bit about them.

What is a mascot?

In short a mascot is a representative figure, a symbol and a communication tool for somebody/some organization. At its best the mascot personifies their values, communicates effectively and helps them stand out from the crowd.

I talk about 'company mascots' to keep this simple. Same things apply to mascots for others, so feel free to replace "company" with something/somebody else.

Note also that I'm writing about mascots designed as company symbols, not about mascots designed for campaigns or for products. A well designed company mascot does lend itself to campaigns and merchandising, but things don't work so well the other way around. There are exceptions, Mickey Mouse being a prime example – Mickey became an icon for Disney though he wasn't planned as such.

How to design a mascot?

A mascot is essentially a well-designed cartoon character with strong connection to the company it represents. The following elaborates on **qualities of a good mascot** – things to aim for.

- **Connection to company profession and values.** Simplest thing is to have character do the job the company is best known for. Then give the mascot personality, style and way of doing things that reflect the best things the company stands for. Colour palette-connection would help as well.
- **Background story.** Giving a mascot a story makes all future decisions easier as we know WHO he/she/it is. Personal goals and story give mascot things to do, provides material for campaigns and overall offers mascot some believability.
- **Appeal.** A live-action actor has charisma, animated character has appeal. With people charisma means a lot more than just 'cute' or 'handsome', and so it is with cartoon characters, too. *Appeal* stands for simplicity, pleasing design and charm/magnetism. Why these give appeal? Simple is both easier to read and communicates better than complex. Pleasing design means good forms and it doesn't always mean they are pretty, more like well-drawn and stylized. What visual style is effective varies from character to character, but one overall solid trick is exaggeration in dimensions and characteristics. Finally we have charm or personal magnetism; It is, in my opinion, the ability to communicate with emotion (usually something positive).
- **Style for target audience.** Cute mascots attract the female and young children audience. Cool (and sexy) is a bigger hit with males. Consideration here should of course be about your company image, what represents it better?
- **Props and accessories** add to the design and are way to say more about the mascot.

Above points are about design, but note that your character doesn't become a mascot without **Active and Consistent use**. Company mascot has to be out there to become known. Use it in all suitable mediums, but be consistent – don't let the tool or the campaign define who you mascot is. An example of what not to do: A company uses a random mascot with no personality, have no story to go with it and tend to change the mascot a lot between campaigns. Then mascot serves mainly as eye-candy – it may help the campaigns stand out from others, but really this is the least you can do with a mascot.