NationalJournal

DAILY   DAYBOOK   HOTLINE   RACE TRACKER   PRESENTATIONS   DATA & CHARTS   ALMANAC   EVENTS

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 16, 2016

GRASSROOTS   PAC MANAGEMENT   SOCIAL MEDIA   CAMPAIGNS   ADVOCACY   STORYTELLING   FLY-INS
RESEARCH   LOBBYING   WASHINGTON IN THE INFORMATION AGE
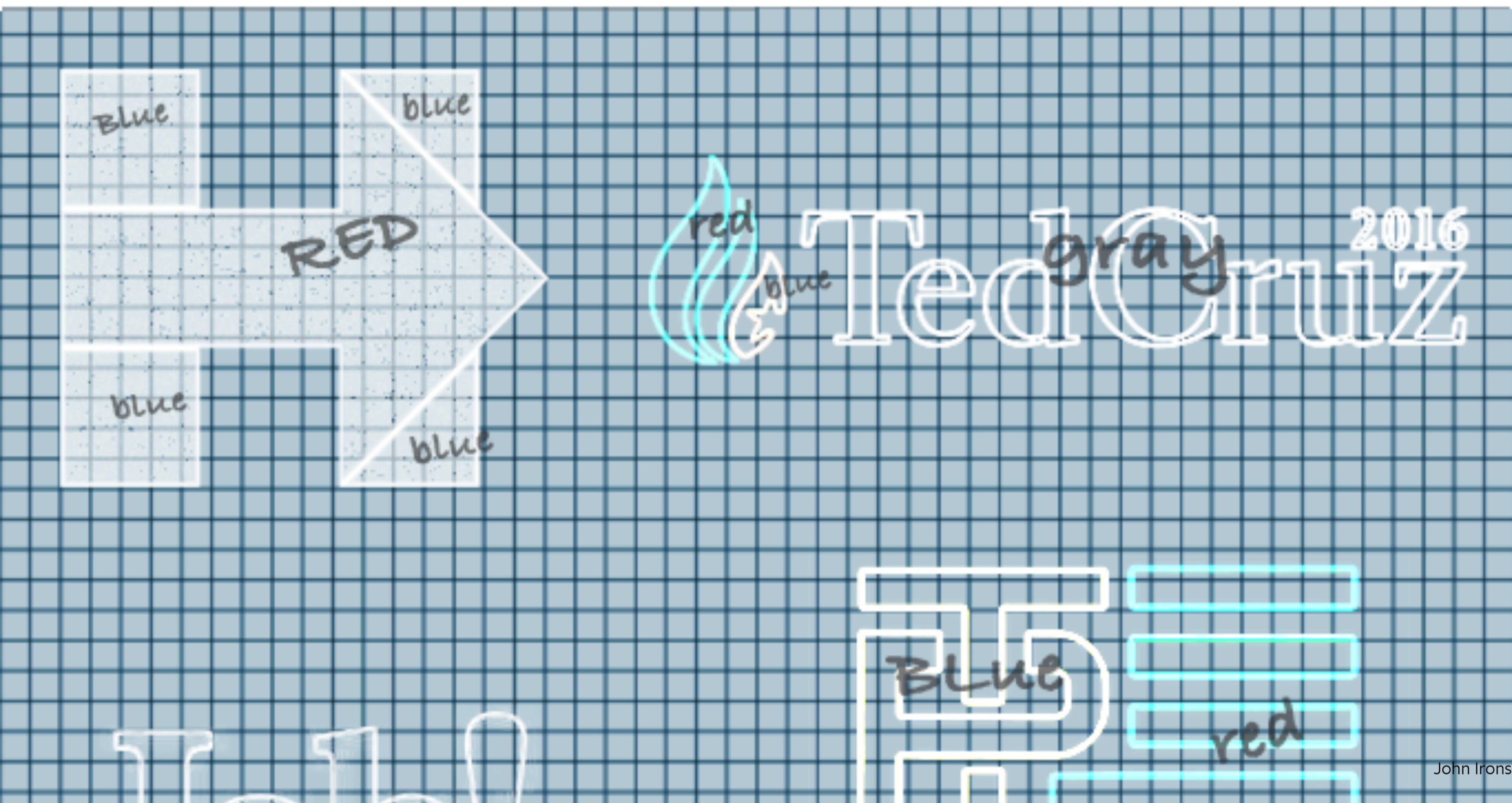
MY ACCOUNT

★ BRIEFCASE

The Dos and Don'ts of Political Logos

It's a fine line between memorable design and campaign embarrassment

John Irons

☆ ADD TO BRIEFCASE

Sam Schwarz

@SNSCHWARZ4

🕐 July 31, 2016, 8 p.m.

L ittle has united Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump over the past year, but they could have supported each other through difficult campaign-logo rollouts.

When it was unveiled last April, Clinton's logo was trashed by a number of design experts, who criticized its conservative-looking, rightward-facing arrow. However, the campaign stuck with the logo and it has since been adapted and embraced by many of her allies.

When Trump selected Indiana Gov. Mike Pence as his running mate, the logo that accompanied the announcement lasted only 24 hours before being scrapped. The design, which featured a monogram of the letters "T" and "P", was mocked in some quarters for evoking the abbreviation for toilet paper, while others made comments about the nature in which the "T" intersected the "P."

With more than 200 million Americans eligible to vote, candidates can only share their story in person with a few at a time. While they campaign in one part of the country, their logo has to do their retail politicking for them across the country. And the stakes can be high.

"Logos are a way for people to have a consistent visual marker for what the campaign is, something they'll instantly recognize, something that sinks into the back of your brain and doesn't leave," said Matt Ipcar, a graphic designer and leader of the team that evolved the brand for President Obama's 2012 campaign.

While an aesthetically disharmonious design can be met with both derision and apathy, voters also want to feel as if they are being told an authentic story about the candidate.

"The most important thing is at the end of the day communicating an authenticity about the brand," said Ben Ostrower, founder and creative director at Wide Eye Creative, a digital design agency that worked with the Bernie Sanders campaign. "[The public] is very sensitive to a feeling of authenticity."

Ostrower also seeks a sense of originality in the designs he makes, which can be difficult in the world of political logos. Instead of rehashing the same red, white, and blue motifs, he looks outside the political sphere for designs that have worked in other spaces, hiring designers with backgrounds in art and fashion in hopes of gaining a variety of perspectives.

So how does the process work exactly?

"We sit down with the campaign and try to peel back the layers of what story [they're] trying to tell," Ostrower said. "We really seek to focus on what story we want to tell, what message we want to convey about a given campaign or candidate."

This is not an overnight process, by any means. The designer and the client sit down and discuss the goals for the logo. Then, the designer goes to work, coming up with multiple options before presenting them to the campaign. In an ideal situation, the campaign falls in love with a design and the work is done. More often, the campaign has comments and it's back to the drawing board for the designer, a process often repeated many times until the two sides finally settle on a design.

When the process is hasty, the results can range from a forgettable logo to a campaign embarrassment. Enter Donald Trump.

"Given how last-minute the Pence pick was, something was rushed out without a lot of thought and of course landed with a thud, because it wasn't given a lot of creative consideration," said Ostrower.

While Trump's selection of Pence was last minute, Ipcar said that is no excuse for the "sexually suggestive" logo, arguing that a well-run campaign would have created a generic image of what the logo would look like months ago. On the other hand, according to *USA Today*, the Clinton campaign was prepared for any scenario, as they had a graphic designer mock up 16 potential logos bearing both first and last names of potential running mates.

With Pence on the short list, the Trump campaign should have designed and vetted a logo ahead of time and rolled it out with the announcement. Instead, both Ostrower and Ipcar believe the campaign was unprepared, and they rolled out an awkward logo with no coherent message.

"It had no meaning. It didn't communicate any story or authenticity about who Trump or Pence are," Ostrower said. "We're dealing with a very savvy public. They know when they see something that is either sloppy or not well thought-out."

So how can logo debacles be avoided in the future?

There are two cardinal sins when it comes to logo design, Ostrower says.

The first: "approaching the design without much thought. The Trump-Pence logo is a classic example of that happening."
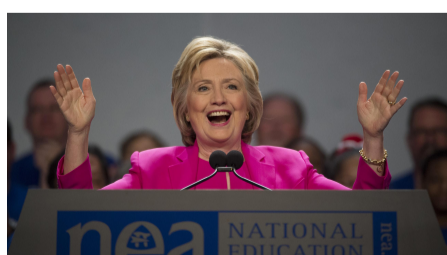
The second?

"Never use comic sans."

SHARE   TWEET   EMAIL

RECOMMENDED FOR YOU

Profiles of freshman class members of the 115th Congress

Why Clinton Has a Millennial Problem
BY COLIN DIERSING

Clinton Runs Free of Indictment
BY CHARLIE COOK

Smart Ideas, Convention Edition: Is Trump Putin's Man in Washington?

Obama Still Defiant on Pacific Trade Deal
BY GEORGE E. CONDON JR.

Republicans Have Only Themselves to Blame for Trump
BY CHARLIE COOK

Facebook

LinkedIn

Presentation Center

Washington Data & Charts