

SPECIFICITIES OF BRAND DESIGN IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

The report focuses on the problems and specificities of brand design of higher education institutions in Bulgaria, including an analysis of Medical University – Plovdiv and Technical University – Sofia, Plovdiv branch. The paper discusses the creation of a graphic identity, the development of a brandbook and its implementation. In addition, the benefits of brand design in higher education and its application in all aspects are presented. The report also includes a comparison with practices in world-renowned universities. The main objective is to explore how brand design can improve the communication, attractiveness and reputation of higher education institutions.

Key words: brand, design, higher education, graphic identity, brandbook, Medical University – Plovdiv, Technical University – Sofia, Plovdiv branch.

INTRODUCTION

Brand design plays a key role in creating and maintaining the identity of higher education institutions (HEIs). It not only helps to build a visual identity but also contributes to the reputation, attractiveness and perception of the institution by potential students, academics and partners alike. It includes visual and conceptual elements that create a unique and recognisable face of the institution. Although creating a brand design is challenging, it is essential to maintaining the competitiveness of academic institutions. Examples from world-renowned universities, such as Harvard University and Stanford University, demonstrate how a strong brand identity can contribute to an institution's global perception and success.

In this context, this report examines the specifics of the brand design of Medical University – Plovdiv and Technical University – Sofia, Plovdiv branch. It analyses the creation of graphic identity, the development of a brandbook and its implementation in operation, presenting examples from other international universities. The aim is to highlight the importance of a well-developed brand design for the attractiveness, reputation and effectiveness of higher education institutions.

1. BRAND DESIGN IN THE CONTEXT OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Brand design in the context of higher education encompasses many aspects, including logotype, colour schemes, typography, and visual elements that create a unique and recognisable identity. Graphic identity is a key component that visually represents the mission, vision, and values of the institution. The brandbook, in turn, is a document that describes all aspects of the visual identity and provides guidelines for its implementation.

In recent years, research on brand design in higher education has been growing, with a focus on creating a consistent and recognisable identity. According to a study by Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka (2016), successful brand design increases the competitiveness of universities and helps attract students, funding and academic staff. International examples include the brand

designs of the University of Oxford and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), which use specific colour schemes, typography and visual elements to create a unique identity.

One of the key ingredients of successful brand design is the creation of a brandbook. The brandbook contains guidelines for the use of logos, colour palettes, typography, and other visual elements, ensuring consistency in the university's communication. Creating a brandbook requires detailed planning and an understanding of the institution's mission and vision. These guidelines are essential to maintaining the University's vision and reputation across all communication channels.

Brand design in higher education involves many aspects that must be considered when creating the institution's identity. These include:

- **Logo:** The logo is the main visual symbol of the university. It should be unique and easily recognisable.
- **Colour schemes:** The use of specific colour palettes helps to create a consistent visual identity.
- **Typography:** The choice of fonts plays an important role in the communication of the institution.
- **Visual elements:** Graphic elements, icons and other visual components complement the overall identity.

International examples

Many world-renowned universities have developed graphic identity guides (brandbooks or guidelines) that exemplify best practices in brand design:

- **Harvard University:** the university's logo includes a classic red and white colour scheme, symbolising the tradition and prestige of the institution. The brandbook includes guidelines for the use of the logo and other visual elements, as well as messaging and tone across all communication channels.



Figure 1: Harvard University Logo and Design Examples from Harvard Business School

- **Stanford University:** Stanford's visual identity is built around modern and clean lines, with an emphasis on the colour red. The brandbook details all aspects of the graphic identity, including guidelines for social media and digital communication.



FIGURE 2: Logo and Design Examples from Stanford University

- **Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT):** The brandbook contains detailed visual communication guidelines that apply to all aspects of university life. It is important to note that these guidelines focus primarily on visual branding aspects and do not address brand communication and messaging.

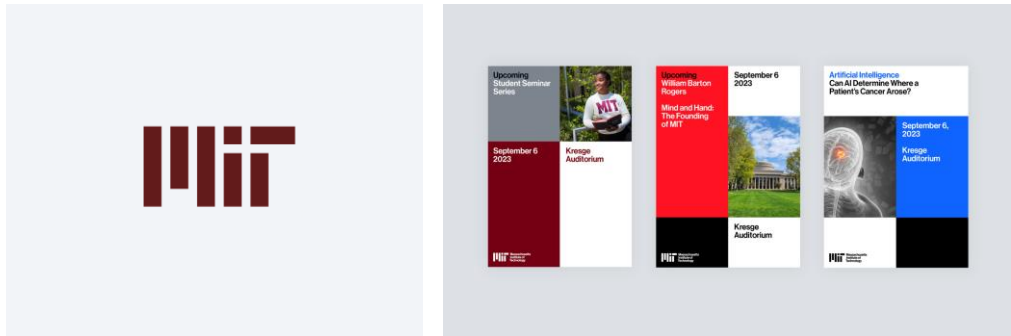


Figure 3: Logo and Design Examples from MIT

PRESENTATION OF THE BRANDS OF MEDICAL UNIVERSITY – PLOVDIV AND TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY – SOFIA, PLOVDIV BRANCH

Medical University – Plovdiv

Medical University – Plovdiv (MU-Plovdiv), established in 1945, is a leading institution in Bulgaria for medical education and research, renowned for its achievements and innovations. The university's involvement in global medical associations highlights its commitment to best practices and collaboration. It serves a vast community through its various faculties, research projects, and university hospitals, aiming to strengthen its prestigious reputation and foster a strong sense of belonging among students and staff. A recent rebranding effort, including a redesigned logo and a refined colour palette, reflects the institution's values and enhances its impact by reinforcing its tradition, prestige, and commitment to excellence.



Figure 4: Logo and Examples from the Visual Identity of Medical University of Plovdiv

Its brand design is recognisable and includes the following main elements:

- **Logo.** The coat of arms of Medical University – Plovdiv follows heraldic traditions and includes symbols that characterise the university. The central element is the scepter of Asclepius, symbolising the medical profession, situated on an open book, which represents knowledge and scientific progress. The lions that surround the book symbolise strength, courage and justice. At the top of the coat of arms are the seven hills of Plovdiv, symbolising the stability of the university and the city. At the base of the coat of arms is illustrated the Maritza River, representing the life and dynamics of the institution.
- **Typography.** The main institutional font, Maritsa and the additional font, Calibri, are used for the text, while Times New Roman is used for official correspondence. The Bulgarian serif typeface Maritsa has been chosen as the brand font and is used for the university name in the logo and for selected official occasions. The main institutional font Maritsa, designed by Stefan Peev, gives the brand uniqueness, while Calibri and Times New Roman provide functionality and legibility.
- **Color scheme.** The colour palette of the Medical University – Plovdiv is carefully selected to reflect the core values of the institution. The colour scheme includes burgundy, crimson red, light neutrals and gold. These colours convey a sense of prestige, tradition and professionalism. The main institutional colour is burgundy, symbolising love, perseverance and commitment. Gold represents purity, faith and high morals. Turquoise is associated with harmony and balance, and yellow is associated with vitality and enthusiasm. To communicate with different target groups, such as prospective students, students and the scientific community, Medical University – Plovdiv uses additional colour palettes. For prospective students, saturated and vibrant colours such as coral, yellow and aqua are used to evoke a sense of dynamism and ambition. For undergraduate and postgraduate students, warm and inclusive colours are chosen to create a sense of balance and harmony. For the scientific community, dark colours are used to emphasise professionalism and prestige.

- **Images and Graphic Elements.** The images and graphic elements used in university materials convey significant stories and highlight the mission and values of the institution. They create a sense of belonging, quality and prestige and represent the depth and complexity of the brand, evoking emotions and reactions on a subconscious level.

Technical University – Sofia, Plovdiv Branch

In the era of globalisation and competition in education, the graphic identity of Technical University – Sofia, Plovdiv Branch, plays a key role in attracting students and maintaining the reputation of the institution. The graphic identity represents the core values, culture, mission, and vision of the university, which are reflected in all aspects of its activities, from educational programs to marketing campaigns and interaction with society. Technical University of Sofia, Plovdiv Branch, is distinguished by its innovative and modern approach to brand design. The corporate vision has been developed to be expandable, complementary and upgradable.



Figure 5: Logo and Examples from the Visual Identity of TU-Sofia, Branch Plovdiv

Elements of the graphic identity include the logo, colour palette, typography and other visual elements that are designed to reflect the technical focus of the university:

- **Logo.** The logo of the university is a spatial figure that is likened to a hexahedron in two-dimensional space. The hexahedron symbolises balance, harmony and perfection while also suggesting a sense of equality and reliability.
- **Typography.** The Montserrat typeface has been chosen as the main typeface. It is used throughout the University's visual communication, including in the logo, promotional materials, and official documents, and appropriate serifs, sans-serif, and decorative

serifs, which have been defined to blend with the main selected institutional font. Montserrat is a geometric sans-serif font designed by Argentinian graphic designer Julieta Ulanovsky. Featuring a large x-height, short descenders and wide apertures, this font achieves high legibility even at small sizes. Montserrat was developed in a large family consisting of nine weights (from thin to black and supports an extended range of Cyrillic characters, including the so-called "Bulgarian" Cyrillic. With its geometry and legibility, it provides a modern and professional look to the brand and is the basis for excellent interactions with many other fonts.

- **Colour scheme.** The University uses two colour palettes. The official palette includes a deep blue-violet and shades of blue, complemented by a warm yellow. The primary colour scheme of dark blue-violet, warm yellow and shades of blue creates a sense of tradition, security and technological advancement. The formal colour palette lends stability, professionalism and authority. This is important for communications with external partners, institutions, sponsors and alumni. Maintaining colour consistency helps build a recognisable and respected brand. The second palette, aimed at a youth audience, includes indigo, two dynamic oranges and a deep red. A dark blue-violet (indigo) is present in both palettes, creating a natural connection between them. The palette for students and prospective students is more vibrant and appealing to engage young people and make the university attractive to prospective students. It highlights youthful energy and creativity. The fresher and brighter colours create an energetic and welcoming atmosphere. This palette is suitable for use on social media, advertising campaigns, the website and other platforms where the aim is to attract attention and communicate more informally.
- **Images and Graphic Elements.** The images and graphic elements used in the university branding materials are not just about aesthetics – they are strategic tools that help shape the institution's identity, foster connections, and drive engagement with its diverse audiences. By telling the university's story in a visually compelling way, they enhance the overall impact of the brand and ensure that it resonates on multiple levels.

The symbols, colours and fonts used by the brands of the Medical University – Plovdiv and the Technical University – Sofia, Plovdiv Branch, play a key role in building the visual identity of the universities. They reflect their values and traditions and help to create a recognisable and prestigious image. Visual identity is an important element of the brand strategy of the universities, which contributes to establishing them as leading institutions in the field of education and science.

BENEFITS OF BRAND DESIGN IN HIGHER EDUCATION

- **Attractiveness to potential students:** A well-developed brand identity makes the university more attractive to prospective students by highlighting its unique strengths and culture.
- **Strengthening reputation:** A consistent visual identity helps to establish the institution's reputation and create trust among the academic community and partners.
- **Enhancement of communication:** The brandbook provides clear guidelines for visual communication, making it easier to create consistent marketing materials and official documents.

- **Identity and Belonging:** Visual identity creates a sense of belonging among students and staff while strengthening the bond between them and the institution.

BENEFITS OF GRAPHIC IDENTITY MANUALS – BRANDBOOK

Compiling a brandbook provides guidelines for the use of visual elements, ensuring consistency and professionalism in the University's communication.

A brandbook is a valuable tool for:

- **Facilitating internal and external communication:** The brandbook provides clarity and guidance to all employees and partners of the institution, ensuring that everyone is using the same visual elements and messaging.
- **Maintaining the institution's identity:** With its guidelines, the brandbook helps preserve the university's unique identity by preventing misuse of logos, colours and fonts.
- **Increasing the university's recognition and reputation:** A consistent visual identity makes the university more recognisable and increases its credibility among students, faculty and partners.
- **Supporting marketing efforts:** The brandbook provides guidance for marketing materials, ensuring that all advertising and communication campaigns are visually consistent and effective.

DISCUSSION AND SYNTHESIS OF THE PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES IN BRAID DESIGN.

One of the main challenges in graphic identity implementation is maintaining consistency in the use of brand elements. Lack of adequate training and resources can lead to inappropriate use of logos, colour palettes, and typography that can damage the institution's reputation. Additionally, the creation and implementation of a brandbook requires significant effort and coordination among various departments within the university.

Implementation problems

- **Inadequate staff training:** Without proper training, employees may misuse brand elements, leading to inconsistency and potential damage to the university's reputation.
- **Limited resources:** Creating and maintaining a brand identity requires significant financial and human resources. Small universities or those with limited budgets may have difficulty securing the necessary resources.
- **Resistance to change:** Implementing a new brand design may meet resistance from employees who are used to the old visual elements and ways of working.

Overcoming challenges

- **Investment in training and development:** Universities need to invest in staff training to ensure that brand elements are used correctly.
- **Create internal resources and teams:** Creating internal teams responsible for maintaining and developing brand identity can help ensure consistency and effectiveness.

- **Gradual introduction of change:** Gradual introduction of new brand elements can reduce resistance and ease the transition to the new identity.

CONCLUSIONS

Brand design plays a key role in building the identity and reputation of higher education institutions. Examples from Medical University – Plovdiv and Technical University – Sofia, Plovdiv branch show how well-developed graphic identity and branding can contribute to the success of the institution. Despite the challenges associated with implementation and maintaining consistency, the benefits of brand design are significant.

A well-developed brand design not only enhances the university's external communication but also facilitates internal processes and strengthens the institution's identity. Going forward, higher education institutions should continue to invest in the development of their visual identity, striving to innovate and adapt to the changing needs of their audiences.

Brand design is a critical element in the management and development of higher education institutions. It not only creates a visual identity but also supports the institution's mission and vision while attracting and retaining students and partners. The examples discussed from medical and technical universities in Bulgaria demonstrate how a well-developed brand identity can contribute to the success and recognition of these institutions at national and international levels.

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