An Identity Campaign for the Kaleidoscope Children's Cultural Museum

An Honors Thesis (ID 499)

by

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The Project

The basic project was to develop an identity package for the Kaleidoscope Children's Cultural Museum, a fictitious museum in San Francisco. In order to begin, I first needed to create an image, a reputation, and a style appropriate for this client. I also had to do the appropriate research on the city (its attitudes, trends, feelings), the target markets, the competitors, the types and styles of design currently produced in the area, and on other children's museums. Then I was to decide what specific types of exhibits are appropriate for this place and what the goals of this museum would be. Once this was complete, I began to design an identity which I think promotes these goals and meets the needs of the museum.

No matter how beautifully designed a logo or poster or any object is, if it does not communicate effectively while meeting and satisfying the client's needs, it has not succeeded and is not good design. My goal was to design a logo, firstly, which is attractive and which communicates the attitude of the Kaleidoscope Children's Cultural Museum. This was then applied to a letterhead/envelope/business card ensemble, and from there I went on to create a low-budget monthly newsletter format, poster, shopping bag, guide book, and package design. My intent was that all of these pieces should form a cohesive whole without being redundant. They serve as a basis for a complete identity system for this museum, which could include signage, banners, exhibits, brochures, uniforms, and many other things.

The Competitors

Of all the factors I researched, such as the characteristics of the city, the competitors were the most closely evaluated. When the creators of this museum researched the available types of museums in San Francisco, they discovered that their competitors are strong and well-established. Among the nearly 50 museums for adults are several aimed specifically at children. The California Academy of Sciences opened a Discovery Room in 1978. Geared towards children in the 6th grade and below, the children have direct contact with a variety of natural history products and materials, as well as with a variety of books and costumes. Their facilities include a touch tank and tide pool. In 1986, approximately 93,000 people visited the Discovery Room.

The Exploratorium, opened in 1969, is multi-disciplinary in nature, integrating science, technology and the arts. Classes on different topics are held for both children and adults. They have an artist-in-residence, a concert and performance series, free weekend movie matinees, and special programs all year long. Of the 500,000 annual visitors, over half are adults; 65 percent are from the Bay area, and the other 35 percent come from around the world.

The Josephine D. Randall Junior Museum has offered a comprehensive program since 1937. Targeting 9-12 year olds, with some activities appealing to younger children and adults, the 16-acre site includes exhibit areas, classrooms, computer lab, live animal room, seismograph, auditorium and library. They offer classes, workshops, science fairs, field trips and campouts, and serve approximately 25,000 people per year, mainly from San Francisco.

The fourth main competitor is the San Francisco Zoological Gardens, open since the mid-1950s. Their facilities include a main barn, nursery and waterfowl exhibit. They also have a contact yard with domestic animals, a nature trail, an insect zoo, exhibits with natural settings for mammals and local wildlife, and about 25 exhibits of domestic and exotic animals. About 300,000 people visit the Children's Zoo each year. (Zucker, Barbara Fleisher. Children's Museums, Zoos, and Discovery Rooms. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, Inc., 1987.)
When deciding what type of exhibits to offer, the strengths of our largest would-be competitors were strongly considered. Wishing to complement their offerings, rather than compete in their well-established areas, the Kaleidoscope decided to look at the word *culture* not in the sense of the arts, but more as the cultures of different peoples. By taking this unique approach, the museum is able to offer new twists to familiar topics. Another important idea is offering an interactive approach, as many children’s museums do, since it works very well. By combining the two, the Kaleidoscope allows the children to learn by participating in every exhibit. Whether it be by preparing food, learning a song or joining in a dance, every child will have a unique experience to remember. Because much of one’s visit will be influenced by the other visitors there at that time, no two visits to the same exhibit by one person will be the same. This makes it an ideal place for children from San Francisco to get involved, and of course it is appropriate for visitors as well. The parents, although not specifically the target, will have the chance to participate with their children, and to “experience” the displays. Because of the nature of the topics, they should learn new things with each visit, too.

**The Name**

The word *kaleidoscope* comes from three Greek words meaning *beautiful, a form, and to see.* [Source unknown] A kaleidoscope, as defined by Webster, is simply, “An optical instrument which exhibits an endless variety of colored figures.” In reality, a kaleidoscope is much more exciting. This device, invented in 1816 by Sir David Brewster, forms its image by the reflection of colored objects onto long mirrors which line the kaleidoscope. After its invention, this educational toy was popular for many years among adults and children, and has been teaching and charming viewers ever since. Designers have even used the kaleidoscope to find new patterns for rugs, wallpaper and fabrics. When one looks through a kaleidoscope, he can create a never-ending variety of patterns and colors and shapes which metamorphize into still more patterns when the device is turned. This principal of constant change and discovery is the foundation for the Kaleidoscope Children’s Cultural Museum.

**The Museum**

As already mentioned, the Kaleidoscope Children’s Cultural Museum is a special place, where children have fun and learn about other people’s traditions, languages, attitudes, and many, many other aspects of their ways of life. This experience is intended to prompt the child to compare that way of life to his own, and eventually lead to a better understanding of the child’s place in the world. To help foster this understanding, the museum offers a wide variety of ever-changing programs. One of these is similar to a pen-pal program. Children who wish to participate are given the names and addresses of children of a similar age in another country. After writing for some time, the museum sponsors a “meeting” via satellite to meet their friends and ask questions face-to-face, so to speak. Another interesting display is one in which small groups of children in another country are asked to draw a picture titled, “How I Picture the United States.” Children from the Kaleidoscope prepare a similar exhibit, and these displays travel around the world. This also provides an interesting basis for dialogue between children in the pen-pal program.

All of this information was created only to serve as a foundation for my design process. Before I could begin to design even one appropriate piece, I had to understand the needs and goals of the client, or in this case, develop the attitudes and goals I felt were appropriate for this place. In this instance, the client’s goal was to express the playful but serious attitude of the Kaleidoscope Children’s Cultural Museum. I believe the following work does just that.
The development of the logo was a long process. A symbol/mark/logo must be simple, easily identifiable, and powerful. It must also be easily adaptable to different objects and must work well in several different sizes. My thought process took me in three totally different directions, as is shown below.

In the first of these, I attempted to treat the children almost as elements of a kaleidoscope, in the sense that they were reflected around a circle. I simplified and abstracted the children, while trying to show the aspects of participation and fun. In the middle version, I opted for a more realistically-based approach, using two young boys playing together. Neither of these directions seemed to be talking about all the museum could offer. They attempted to address the “fun” part, but seemed to be ignoring the rest.

Finally, I created the third logo. This, to me, captures the essence of the Kaleidoscope (the museum and the toy). It shows a young child captivated by the splendor and wonder of it all — the colors, the shapes, the patterns and the light. Portrayed realistically, it is a change from many logos seen today, and the style allows people to identify with the child. It is easily applicable to many things because the background may easily be either simplified or enhanced, depending on the size it is to be reproduced. It also incorporates the beautiful forms created by kaleidoscopes, and those elements can change from one application to the next, if need be. I think that this version is by far the most successful in communicating many different aspects of the Kaleidoscope — the colors, shapes, patterns, discovery and wonder of it all.
The letterhead ensemble is usually one of the first pieces designed for any organization after the logo is complete. In this case, and in most others, this is of crucial importance. A letterhead conveys your image to a potential business contact and conveys important information. The name, address and phone number tell the recipient where to contact you or your company's services if desired. It also must allow for easy use — that is, there must be ample room for the correspondence it carries, for that is the purpose of any company letterhead. In designing this ensemble, I considered the fact that this letterhead would be used primarily for communications between the administrators of the Kaleidoscope and other people in similar positions, both within the museum and outside of it. In this respect, it is appropriate to design a refined, somewhat formal format, even for a place such as the Kaleidoscope. Small touches, such as the solid purple printed on the backs of the letterhead and business card, still allow the recipient to know that this place is a little different. The colors selected for use here were very important, too, as they became the primary colors used in designing the rest of the pieces.
Intended to be a monthly publication, the newsletter published by the Kaleidoscope is titled Your Turn. This low-budget publication is written by student volunteers, who view the events in a similar way to the children who visit. It is primarily a reminder of upcoming events and exhibits for those children who live in the area, with occasional reviews of past events. The format is flexible, and can easily accommodate articles of varying lengths. Measuring 5-1/2 by 17 inches, the newsletter is half of an 11 x 17 piece of paper. Printed in a light purple on the back, it mimics the letterhead and business card, and folds in half to mail.
This is intended to serve as a basic format for other posters. The vertical format is continued here, and so is the monochromatic coloring of the pattern strip. The photograph would be a high-grain, hand-colored photograph, and the type styles are Bookman and Lithos Bold, the typestyles used throughout the other applications to help keep these pieces consistent. The poster measures 9 by 22 inches. The photographs used here would be similar to, if not the same as, those used in the guidebook, so that when people visit the museum there will be recognition between the posters they saw and the exhibit in which they are participating. All of the pieces are made up of a small number of elements. Arranged differently and put in slightly different formats, these elements hold it all together as one unit.
There is a gift shop at the Kaleidoscope which sells a few unique toys and articles related to the current exhibits. This is the shopping bag used for all purchases. Patterned on all sides, the only white space is a vertical strip on the front which contains the logo. In this way, I was able to let the pattern serve as decoration and at the same time emphasize the name and logo. This vertical band emphasizes the vertical format used throughout the campaign, without forcing us to change the standard sizes of the bags. These would not be just for very large purchases, as many shopping bags are, but would be available in small sizes too, so they would be appropriate for purchases of objects of all sizes.
The first live spread.

The continuation of the article on the featured exhibit.
Treatment of the second story.

Again, this booklet serves as a foundation from which the rest of the book may easily be built. The cover is die-cut to allow the logo and address to show through, and then these are essentially repeated on the title page. The bright color lining the cover is similar to that found on the letterhead, business card and newsletter. The first spread features the month’s main exhibit, and would usually be four pages in length. The first photograph is treated as a vertical element which bleeds top and bottom. The photograph, as on the poster, would be hand-colored and grainy. The strips of monochromatic pattern at the tops and bottoms of each page of copy serve to separate the different articles by changing colors each time, and the use of the patterned elements relates well to all the other pieces. The monochromatic patterns mimic the use of color in the newsletter, and the second photograph of the birthday spread mimics the shape of the die-cut box on the cover.

The booklet would contain information about the four main exhibits featured monthly, as well as a simplified map of the museum. The information serves as a simple overview of the exhibit, and is something that could be equally enjoyed by those who have already seen it as well as those who haven’t. The exhibits change weekly, but each one lasts for one month. For example, the birthday exhibit begins June 1 and lasts throughout the month of June. The next new exhibit would come on June 7th and last until July 7th. The pages for each new exhibit would be printed in advance, and volunteers at the Kaleidoscope would assemble the booklets there as the displays change. A portion of the entry fee would cover the cost of the booklet, so each visitor would receive one as he enters. It will serve not only as reference during the visit but as a sort of souvenir after he leaves.
This product commemorates the first birthday of the Kaleidoscope Museum, which is also the subject of the feature exhibit for the month of June. As stated on the package, the word *kaleidoscope* comes from a Greek word which means *beautiful, a form, and to see*. This kaleidoscope is designed with the idea of creating these beautiful forms yourself. Complete with a box of beads and other colored objects and a removable endpiece on the kaleidoscope, the toy can keep children and adults fascinated for quite a while. The combinations of beads can be planned, such as choosing red balls and green holly leaves for a Christmas-y look, or totally random. Still, the results are usually a surprise. The removable endpiece allows for more variety and more creativity. It allows children to experiment and to find their own objects. This also helps them to better understand how the kaleidoscope works, by actually seeing the mirrors and the objects which created that pattern. They also see what kinds of objects don’t work very well, and can begin to understand that if light cannot pass through an object, it will appear as a dark shape in the viewer.

The package itself is relatively simple, but functional. The package holds the plastic box of beads and kaleidoscope securely. It opens like a book and the instructions are printed on the cover so they are easily accessible and are not easily lost. The kaleidoscope shape in the logo is cut out of the cover to allow people to get a glimpse of the contents. The actual object would be displayed in an open box or even out of the box in the gift shop, though. Because of the nature of the sizes of the beads, and the dexterity required to handle them, this toy would not be suitable for very young children, but in many cases would be sort of a collector’s item.