

Context Group Brand

Design and Implementation

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This article describes the development of the corporate identity for the Context Group, and presents the work done so far. It also provides background information on the processes that apply when working with a professional designer. The most important is to take care that the brand grows steadily and in a stable manner, and therefore remains recognizable.

1. Introduction

A corporate identity we can use to achieve our goals as stated in the bylaws. Given that everything our Context Group does is based on volunteer services, this is not an easy task. What we need is external expertise and aid. We can be proud of the fact that we've found a professional who was willing to donate his time and know-how to help us. In the following paragraphs we would like to present the results of the mounted efforts. In no way is this a full insight in the process, nor does it cover all materials that we have made (and have yet to make), but it will allow a glimpse into this latest addition to our group.

2. Finding a professional designer

The Context Group had been talking about adopting a font for itself for a while. When this was informally discussed with Adrian to see if he knew any that would suit us, he promptly offered to help setting up the CG-brand. Adrian is a freelance art director in the creative industry with many years of experience in this field. In his opinion, this required a broad spectrum approach to lay a solid foundation for the CG brand. After discussing the ideas we had with him, he drew up several proposals for logos and fonts. By voting and deliberation among the board members, we decided on a logo and a font. From there, Adrian developed stationary and other elements for our brand. You can reach Adrian at his design shop Il Meccanico (www.ilmeccani.co)

and through fabbrica at ilmeccani.co.

3. Having a style guide

The first thing we had to learn is to think of the informal Context Group as a brand. However, fact is that it's always been a brand, just hasn't been treated as such. Being a brand, amongst many other things, entails the use of guidelines to ensure that its look and feel are consistent anywhere it may appear. This helps brands grow in the minds of people encountering them, and will bond visual elements (e.g. logos) with the underlying heart of a brand, ie. what a brand is about and trying to project into the world. In our case, it's the promotion of ConTeXt use. To use an example, let's look at the biggest brands out there (judged by brand value, Interbest 2011): Coca-Cola. Over the course of over 100 years, this brand has grown immensely powerful. This combination of type and colour are so intertwined with the brand, that it doesn't even matter if you replace every single letter with something else – people still read it as saying Coca-Cola. There is a deeper level to this as well: when people start linking brand names to products and even feelings. Apple brings forth images of high tech and pleasing aesthetics. Mini conjures up feelings of the joy of driving. These are lengthy processes in any case, and for us, a small group with limited means of publicizing our brand, it will probably take even longer. But if the guidelines are followed and our brand remains consistent through the years,



Figure 1: The levels of communication

we will (even if it's only within a niche) generate similar associations. An important part of the understanding how this works is the application of the three levels of communication.

3.1 The levels of communication

To better understand how this works, and to see what flexibility a brand offers, we've used the pyramid brand model. There are other models available, and they each have their own advantages and disadvantages. This particular model was best suited for the needs of our group and allows us the most freedom. The pyramid shown below visualizes on which level each method of communication belongs. The list is not complete and will be updated as necessary. Each level has a set of guidelines, which are to be followed. Generally speaking, the higher you go in the pyramid, the stricter the guidelines become. You'll also note that the higher up you go, the more "serious" the items listed are (the top is mostly stationary and other businesslike items). For instance, the stationary is part of the corporate level, therefore abides by the corporate level guidelines. Their sole purpose is to look professional, businesslike and communicate clearly. Conferences and meetings on the other hand will have far more relaxed guide-

lines, to suit the social aspect of these events. The only exception from this is the logo and its guidelines — these are in effect for each level and deviations are absolutely unwanted. Thus far we do not have a product level, but may in future.

3.2 The colours

Another thing that's new for the Context Group is the deliberate use of two different colour spaces; CMYK (print) and RGB (screen) respectively. There will be minor differences between them, simply because the colour spaces don't completely overlap. Using the correct colour space for the correct application will minimize this, and ensure the best possible result. Using incorrect colour spaces can result in colour shifts. This applies to anything using our corporate colours, including our logo.

The colour definitions apply to the corporate and tactical levels of the Context Group, where the items are closest to the core of what the Context Group wants to project and achieve. On the product level, colours may be more freely chosen, as long as the overall look & feel of the identity is maintained. Generally we should avoid using corporate colours (or colours very similar to them) on the product level.

3.3 Limitations

Adopting a professional design implies that the designer puts standards (ie. limitations) on the way colors and typography are applied on the different levels of the communication pyramid. For instance on the corporate and tactical level it is prohibited to change the values of the colours. It is also not possible to deviate from the fonts that are to be used on the corporate and tactical level of the communication pyramid. These limitations may seem strict to some, but if used faithfully, they will guarantee the consistency of a brand over time. And by having clear guidelines, multiple people can work on different things, and still have them fit together in the end.

4. The logo

The first step in building a brand, after information and wishes have been gathered, is to develop a logo. We started with two drafts, both in black & white. This was deliberately done in black & white to focus our attention on the shape instead of colours. The first option was a conceptual idea without a direct visual link to the Context Group. The second logo was built using our initials "C" and "G". Both drafts were supplied with a matching font. When the logos were presented, a lively discussion took place on various aspects of these logos. But soon it became obvious, that the second logo was our favourite. Adrian named this logo "Loop" (working title). He described the logo as follows: "Loop" (working title) combines the similar shapes of the capitals "C" and "G" into one, fluid logo by using negative space to form the letters. It is modern and dynamic and independent of colour use. It can be used in colour, black or dia-positive on just about any background. It also incorporates an "infinity symbol" to signify the endless possibilities of T_EX. The fact that it is fundamentally different from any logo in use by other T_EX-user groups will allow the Context Group to build a very unique face within this community. A logo with no clutter and a daring design helps to develop a new brand and increases the chance for the brand to become

a winner. The simpler the logo, the fewer the problems when being scaled or put on busy backgrounds.

All board members could agree on the logo after some slight tweaking. Soon after, colour became a discussion point. While not Adrian's original intention, he was persuaded to try it and found it very becoming. Basically, the vote was between either green or blue. Choosing green would have been in line with the actual colour scheme on ConT_EXt-garden and the preliminary proceedings printed so far. Green uses a lot of yellow, which makes it a weaker colour than blue when printed in black & white. Finally blue was favoured, partially because this redesign allows



Figure 2: The logo

us to choose a wholly new path. The logo is to be used either with the "Context Group" subline or without. Details about the use policy are documented in the forementioned styleguide. For those of you who are interested in the geometrics of this logo, you can see the solution in figure 3:



Figure 3: Drawing the logo

One might be tempted to draw this logo in MetaPost or PostScript. Everybody is free to do as they please, and nobody is going to stop anybody experimenting with it. For all official uses however, we will revert to the original logo as provided by the designer for consistency reasons. Anybody who has a legitimate reason to be supplied with the original logo can request one from the Context Group board, along with the styleguide and correct colour space.

5. The fonts

When Adrian presented “Loop” logo, he advised to combine it with a font family called Alwyn New. We were impressed about the good match and decided to buy this font family for the Context Group brand.

He characterized the font as follows: Alwyn New is a font family by Chris Dickinson from 2008 and published by his font design company Moretype via FontShop. It is chosen for its youthful yet professional and technical feel. It is also very easily legible due to the clean lines and large x-height.

It should be noted that the designer Chris Dickinson gave us a substantial discount due to the fact that we are a non-profit organization. Context Group uses the font Alwyn New [OT] for all levels. For the corporate level, the Context Group uses Alwyn New Thin and Alwyn New Medium (plus their italics) exclusively. A short sample text is given below.

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6. The letter and invoice style

After the decisions were made, it was important to translate the designs into ConT_EXt. Adrian wrote detailed descriptions of all elements in a style guide for the invoice, letter and envelop layout. The invoice-template was built directly in ConT_EXt. To make life easier, Wolfgang Schuster’s Letter-Module was used for the creation of the letter-templates, which offers us different possibilities to present a letter. The given versions comprise a simple letter without any references. The second version, a real business letter, uses a reference list.

The invoice template uses XML to read data directly from the members database. For the letter two templates will be available. One for writing individual letters and one to process mailings, again using code to process the members database.

7. Forthcoming work

Now that we have the most important styles, Adrian is now working on the styles for the proceedings, journal, minutes of meetings etc. The styleguide is also in progress, and should be ready soon. In the meantime we are also discussing with Adrian how to implement this corporate identity on our website.

8. Thanks

The board of Context Group is pleased with the results. We thank Adrian Egger for his efforts, helping us to get and maintaining a strong and professional identity. We also would like to thank Wolfgang Schuster for the letter-module, and Chris Dickinson for his generous discount for the font family.

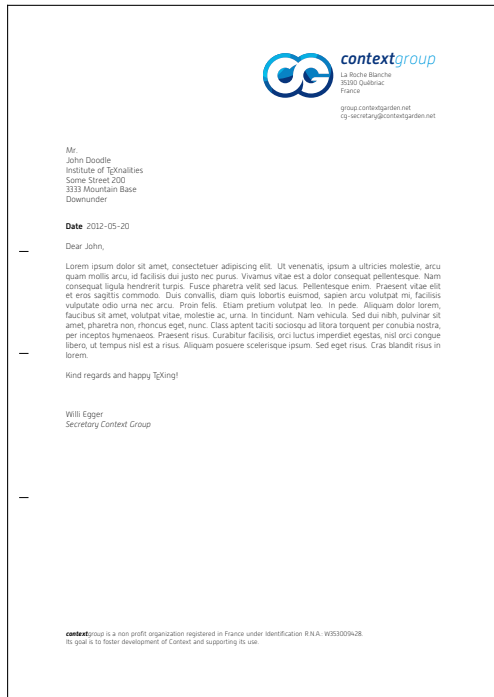


Figure 4: A simple letter

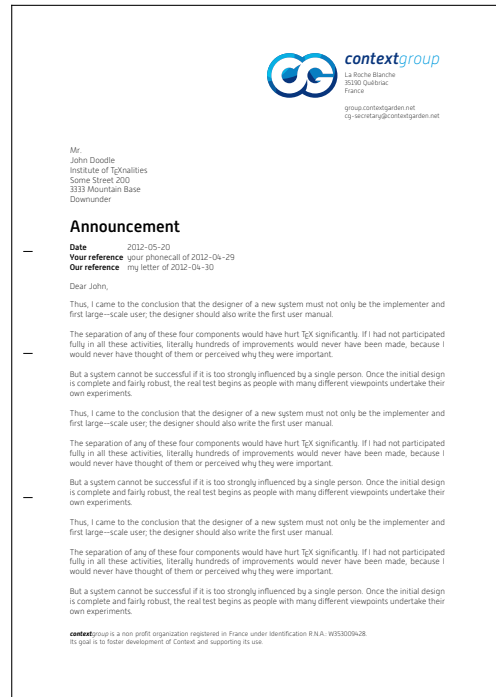


Figure 6: A letter, reference list, first page

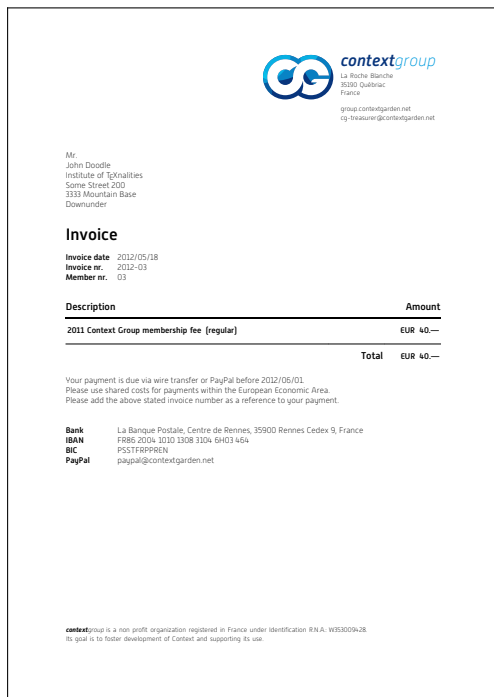


Figure 5: The invoice



Figure 7: A letter, reference list, second page