

Summary

This writing sample, a community branding guide, showcases the collaborative work of McKinley Heard and Dalal Albalawi. The guide revamps the logo and subsequent branding of a local business in Memphis, Tennessee, the Cotton Museum. The museum's original design was unattractive. Heard and Albalawi transformed the unappealing logo to a modern, attractive logo that will increase traffic. Furthermore, the original indoor signage did not coincide with the outdoor signage at all. The branding guide, created using Adobe InDesign, connects the indoor and outdoor signage to make a cohesive design. The logo, created using Adobe Illustrator, and matching indoor and outdoor signage uses an analogous color scheme of green, blue, and yellow. The branding guide serves as an excellent example of collaborative technical communication.

THE
COTTON MUSEUM



AT THE
MEMPHIS
COTTON EXCHANGE

Community Branding Guide

By Dalal Albalawi and McKinley Heard

Mission Statement



The Cotton Museum's official logo



The Cotton Museum's logo above their storefront

The Cotton Museum, located in Memphis, TN, is a historical and cultural museum. The museum, opened to the public in 2006, examines the cotton industry and its many influences on the city of Memphis and its surrounding areas. Before The Cotton Museum boasted its current title, it was called The Memphis Cotton Exchange, "a commodities pricing and regulatory organization founded in 1874" (Roadside America). The Memphis Cotton Exchange set standards for buying and pricing cotton in Memphis, otherwise known as the Bluff City, and allowed cotton merchants to resume the global business of trading cotton after the end of slavery, which had generated the cotton industry (Clark). The Cotton Museum's manager, Ann Bateman, said, "Front Street was once known as Cotton Row, and all the cotton businesses were up and down here. Not only did Memphis have the river, which was the transportation and so forth, but Memphis had one of the very first railroads that went from the Atlantic to the Mississippi River. And so they could transport heavy cotton all the way back from one seashore all the way to the Mississippi River" (Clark).

The Memphis Cotton Exchange was open to private members only. On their blog, the Team at Roadside America states, "It was an Old Boys Club, whose members, if photographs and displays in the museum are correct, spent a lot of their working time smoking and playing dominoes." The Exchange's first floor served as a place where 175 members socialized to get information about world markets and trade their cotton. According to The Cotton Museum's founder, Calvin Turley, "Any kind of government report, or that kind of thing, you would have found out about here [the first floor] before you would have any place else, so it was a very important part of

the central marketplace” (Clark). The Cotton Exchange became unnecessary in the late 1970s because modern technology, such as cell phones and computers, rendered it useless. After it closed, the building was abandoned and went unused for decades until it was restored to be The Cotton Museum.

The Cotton Museum’s logo sports an interesting color scheme: maroon, orange, mint green, and white. It is not at all pleasing to the eye. The layout is extremely busy, and it is hard to know where to look. For our branding guide, we want to modernize and simplify the original logo, as well as change the color scheme. Furthermore, we want to improve their brand messaging. This business, i.e., the cotton business, has a convoluted history, so it is important to make a clear divide between The Museum and The Exchange. The Museum is about The Exchange, but it is not The Exchange. The current logo for The Museum is old-timey looking, and it reflects the past which is not necessarily a good thing when you consider the atrocities of slavery that propelled the business forward. The Museum showcases slavery-era exhibits, but they do not highlight the horrors of slavery in a meaningful way.

There are interactive exhibits where visitors can “push buttons to view cotton bugs and weed pests, see a cotton fiber magnified a gazillion times, and fire a biotechnology ‘gene gun’ to blast DNA into seeds.” Moreover, there is a grim interactive exhibit where visitors lift a sack of cotton to understand how difficult it was for slaves working the fields (Roadside America). This exhibit is extremely tone deaf, to say the least. It completely discounts all of the horrible conditions slaves endured in the fields and essentially turns it into a game. Our idea is to make changes that will attract younger people who have previously been turned off by The Museum. We hope that in changing the design, we can help change the identity of The Museum for the better.



The Cotton Museum Ad



Interactive Cotton Exhibit

The Cotton Museum does not use a color scheme on their logo or signage. Their logo does not influence the internal design of the inside of The Museum at all. We designed a logo that follows an analogous color scheme to make it look cohesive. Our logo and subsequent signage incorporates different shades of blue, green, and yellow. We ultimately decided on these colors because we wanted to evoke nature and freshness. Moreover, the original logo included an image of cotton. We wanted to include an image of cotton as well, and we wanted it to be the most prevalent object of the logo because in the original logo it is not. It instead appears as an afterthought. We also wanted the image of the cotton to look more modern than the original image. Cotton is not the most vibrant plant to illustrate. We played with minimalistic styles before eventually tweaking our logo into its finalized form. Our finalized logo uses elaborate shapes to create a trendy illustration. We stayed true to the wording of the original logo, but we changed the font of the words. The color of the font matches the outline of the leaves on the image of the cotton plant. We knew that if the logo looked interesting, people, especially young people, would be more likely to enter to see if there had been other changes made. At the hypothetical point of unveiling the new logo, The Museum's signage will have been updated to match.

Remembering the Past & Educating the Future

We chose the new motto "Remembering the Past & Educating the Future" because our logo stays true to the original design, but it also incorporates new design elements. The Cotton Museum should embrace the new motto because it is senseless to hide from The Cotton Exchange's significant role in slavery and to downplay the gravity of slaves' circumstances. Our aim in rebranding The Cotton Museum is not only to improve The Museum aesthetically, but to also educate visitors on the history of slavery. The Cotton Museum has a unique opportunity to bring attention to slavery in a way that people often avoid because it is uncomfortable to hear the truth. It is fine to talk about the good things that cotton did for Memphis and the surrounding areas, but The Museum cannot brag about their successes without acknowledging their failures.

Logo



The Cotton Museum highlights the arts influenced by the cotton industry, and we think our logo pays tribute to the arts well. The previous logo did not pay tribute to the arts well because it was not creative. We expect the new logo will attract an artistic audience. Our colors are soothing instead of uncomfortable which will also draw people in. We do not want The Museum to be a hostile environment. We want everyone to feel welcome because everyone is welcome.

As designers, we contemplated whether or not to keep "At The Memphis Cotton Exchange" in the title, and we ultimately decided that it was an integral part of the design and brand identity. Keeping the bottom text reassures community members that The Cotton Museum is not trying to hide the past.

Our app logo is just the cotton image, not the title. We decided to eliminate the title on the app logo because the writing would be impossible to see at such a small size. The edges have been rounded to fit application standards.



Logo Uses

The Cotton Museum will use the new logo across various mediums such as billboards, pamphlets, tickets, souvenirs, employee uniforms, internal and external signage, website materials, etc. The background color of the logo can be changed to corresponding shades of blue and green, but otherwise the background should remain the traditional light yellow. Different shades of yellow or different colors outside of the palette are not permitted as background colors. The font color is not subject to change. Moreover, the background can be expanded, but the shape must remain a square or rectangle.



Yes



Yes



No



No



No



Yes

Typeface



TRAJAN COLOR

Trajan Color, designed by Carol Twombly, Robert Slimbach, and Sérgio Martins, is Adobe's first ever colored font. Trajan Color is "a concept color font designed and developed with Adobe Type in order to test and showcase the possibilities of the Opentype-SVG format (Martins).

We chose the Trajan Color typeface because it is unique, and the dark yellow/gold complements the light yellow background. It also looks good on the optional blues and greens. No matter what color the background is, the font never changes; it should never be changed except for size. We know the Trajan Color font is different, but that is why it is perfect for our modern rebranding.



Our royal blue will be used for gift bags, tickets, and wrist bands.

#4169E1



Our green with blue undertones will be used for general signage: directional signage, outdoor signage/displays, and brochures.

#307D7E



Our light green will be used for gallery and exhibition signage: labels for the artifacts, etc.

#98FF98



Our signature light yellow will be used for all signage fonts across the museum.

#FFFFE0



Our dark olive will be used for any special signage such as one-time exhibits and guest speakers.

#728C00

Works Cited

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