

from *What is Graphic Design?* by Alice Twemlow  
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## Identity design

Until fairly recently, designing an identity for a corporation or an institution was about distilling the essence of that corporation or institution down into a single graphic mark or logo. This logo would then be applied to the various surfaces of a company's physical presence in the world—from letterhead to trucks—following the guidelines set out in a style manual. Now, however, as the contexts and uses of branding become increasingly complex, identities have needed to evolve into more flexible, multifaceted, and fluid systems that perform different functions for the different groups of people who encounter them.

With the opening in the spring of 2005 of the Walker Art Center's new expansion, designed by the Swiss architects Herzog & de Meuron, there was an opportunity for Minneapolis's premier forum for the arts to reinvent itself. "It makes sense to develop a new identity system to help signal a new institution," says Andrew Blauvelt, design director at the Walker. "The main question was: how can the Walker approach the idea of a graphic identity in a fresh way?"

Blauvelt says he wanted the new identity to be: "Visually distinct, conceptually and technologically unique, yet totally in the hands of the designer. It needed to have some very simple rules about application and work at a variety of scales: Small enough for a business card, but large enough for a wall." He also wanted it to build on, rather than replace, the Walker typeface designed by Matthew Carter for the museum in 1995. "Just as the architecture of our expansion does not ignore what already exists, a new identity must acknowledge what has come

before," says Blauvelt. The new identity incorporates the Walker font for specific purposes such as gallery titling and on a light box building sign. "The fact that we have an in-house staff responsible for the look and feel of all communications means that we exercise control over the design and can avoid the legacy of the style manuals and guides that render an identity static and eventually stale," says Blauvelt.

The idea for the identity grew as Blauvelt was thinking about the work of Daniel Buren, an artist who has used vertical striping as what Blauvelt describes as, "A kind of surrogate for the art object." Blauvelt began to think about a line—the simplest dynamic of geometry—and whether it could be used to represent the Walker. "Could it be as simple as a piece of tape?" he wondered. The designers knew that the identity had to fulfill many diverse functions. Sometimes, it would need to behave quietly within the context of other things; sometimes it would be alone and would have to perform in a more explicit and dramatic way. Blauvelt was interested in exploring whether the system

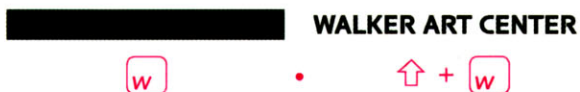
### **Top right: Instructions for using Walker Expanded**

The Walker Art Center's identity functions as a typeface, but instead of using bold and italic fonts it is grouped into related words, or vocabularies, and repeating patterns.

### **Bottom right: Parking garage wall graphics**

These demonstrate how the new identity can be applied to surfaces like a roll of tape.

- Step 1 Select a font and choose a word by typing the corresponding character



- Step 2 Delete space bar to overlap elements



- Step 3 Choose a pattern



- Step 4 Overlap the two lines by setting the leading to zero



- Step 5 Repeat to create a line and customize the color





Above left: Notebook from the Walker Shop

Above right: Walker Shop bag

Left: Self-mailer envelope







Left: Walker Art Center  
gallery pass

could grow and change over time and whether there was, "A specific gesture that could be recognizable even if some of the elements were variable (like words, colors, textures)."

The identity they developed, known as Walker Expanded, sets lines of words, patterns, and textures that, like a roll of tape, can be applied to virtually anything—from printed matter and Web sites to merchandise and architecture. The identity is always recognizable as a line, but the elements that compose the line are variable.

Type designer Eric Olson worked with the team to develop the unique type-based system that generates the identity. It functions as a typeface but, instead of being organized into weights and styles like bold and italic, the fonts are structured around groups of related words. They operate like vocabularies, and can be tailored to specific audiences and specific contexts. One font, called Peer to Peer, is for use within the institution, while Public Address talks in terms more accessible to the general public. The shop has its own vocabulary-based font, too.

Chad Koepfler, a senior designer at the Walker, explains how it is used: "Once you have your word group chosen, you simply hit a single key to generate an entire word. For example, the 'D' key produces the word 'design.' The 'E' key gives you 'exhibitions,' all in the proper size and typeface. Also built into the font are different patterns that can be typed out and set behind a row of words."

Koepfler remarks on how the identity morphs depending on its purpose: "The program or subject and the audience dictates which word groups to use and how dynamically the identity appears." There is also the possibility that some of the vocabularies, such as the group of adjectives used to describe the Walker and its programs, will grow and change over time. Blauvelt foresees them being able to take and incorporate data from visitor surveys, for example. "In this way, this new identity becomes its own little record of institutional change over time," he says.