

Visual Identity 101: How to create a stellar look and feel for your brand

Create a bold, branded visual language for your business without ever having to leave iStock

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Introduction

A powerful visual identity builds brand awareness and memorability, but it boosts business results, too. According to Forbes, “consistent brand presentation across all platforms **increases revenue by up to 23%.**” That means it’s time to start caring about design and visual presentation—not only on your site, but also when it comes to social, ads, blog posts, and any other form of content your audience interacts with.

In today’s crowded marketplace, it can be hard to catch somebody’s eye. A company’s visual messaging is the first thing we come into contact with, and for optimal brand recognition, it needs to be consistent and unique to your brand.

Are you making the most of your visuals throughout all of your brand’s communicative touch-points?

Read on to learn how with **iStock’s extensive and easy-to-use tools and resources.**



What is a visual language?

Your visual language is how all your brand's design elements come together. That includes all imagery, color usage, text and typography, graphic elements like logos and icons, and when applicable, even packaging.





1182872102, NataliaDeriabina

Know your brand

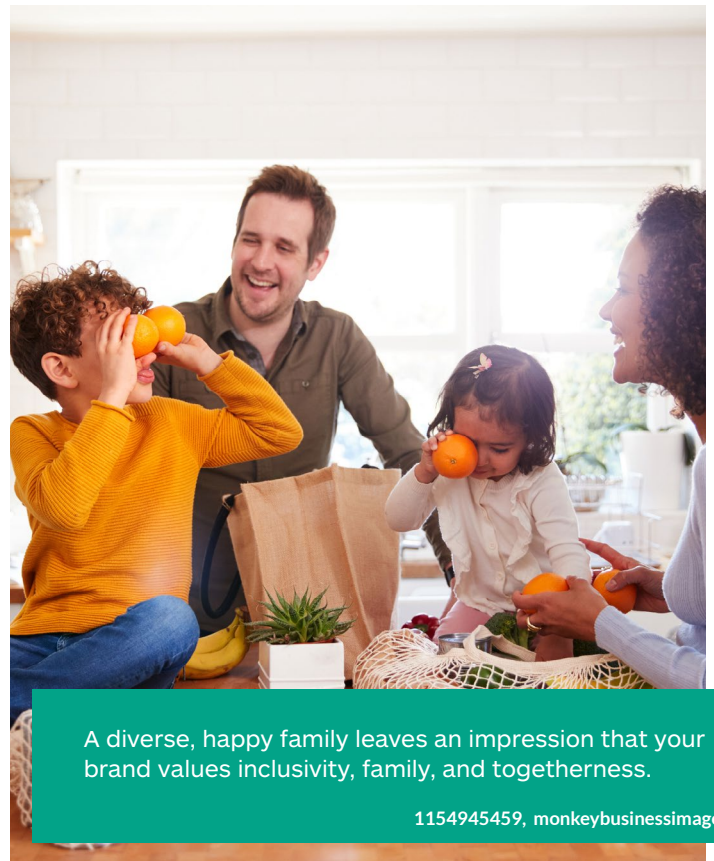
When we speak with our friends, our personality infuses our language and the way we communicate. Brands have personalities, too. If your brand were a person, how would you describe them? **Bold** and intelligent or charming and **sophisticated**? Wholesome and reliable or **young and unique**?

Whatever the combination may be, do some brainstorming to get specific and have a vision in mind moving forward.

Define your values

Getting a handle on your brand mission and values is another great place to start when figuring out your visual language. They ultimately influence your brand's personality and can provide valuable inspiration when determining the "look and feel" of your messaging (see **Selecting Your Style**).

So, make up your mind: are you committed to the environment? Making the world a better place? Helping people feel good about themselves, or something else entirely? Whatever it is, your visuals should reflect where you stand.



A diverse, happy family leaves an impression that your brand values inclusivity, family, and togetherness.

1154945459, monkeybusinessimages



A woman looking out onto a bustling city contributes to an aspirational vision of excitement and adventure.

1132442986, Nattakorn Maneerat

Create a vision

Once you determine your brand values and personality, it's time to start visualizing. [Create a mood board](#) and save snippets of inspiration to develop an aesthetic that's yours alone. See what your direct competitors and favorite brands are up to. How do they present themselves to the world and their audience? How do their design, color, and visual choices support their service or offering, market share, and marketing activities?

What is it about the look they've cultivated that sets them apart? And how can you do the same?

Turn ideas into action

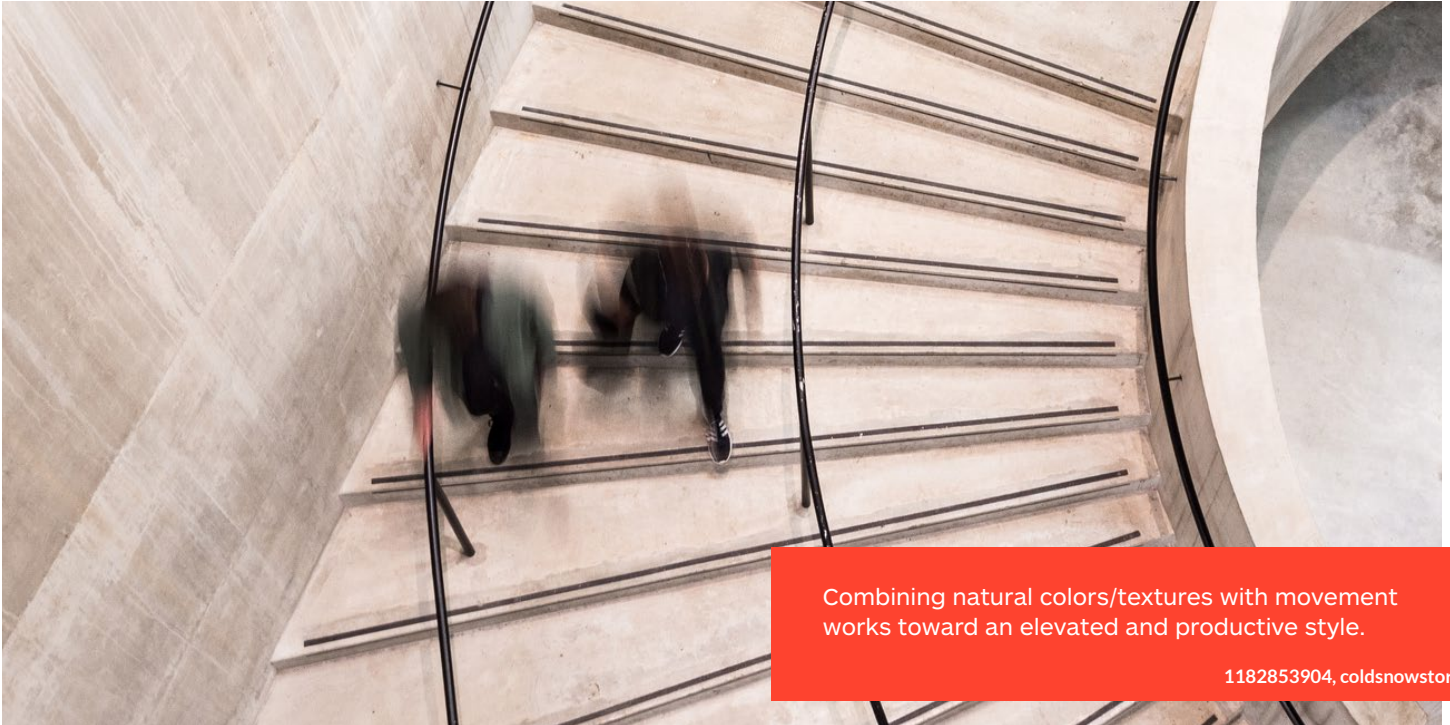
Hunker down and do your homework before committing to a certain look. You may love it, but does your audience? User research and A/B testing are smart ways to go about finding out.

Once you decide on your brand personality and value terms, key them into iStock's search to see what kind of images come up. You may like the sound of "sophisticated," but is it a look that actually speaks to your brand? Is "[trendy](#)" or "[luxury](#)" more on-point? Think a little bigger and see all there is to find.

Physical mood boards can get your inspiration going, but digital ones come in handy, too. On iStock, users [can create multiple Boards](#) to collect, curate, and collaborate on visual decisions.

94502198, Thomas Northcut

Selecting your style



Combining natural colors/textures with movement works toward an elevated and productive style.

1182853904, coldsnowstorm



1204482432, m-imagephotography

Look + feel

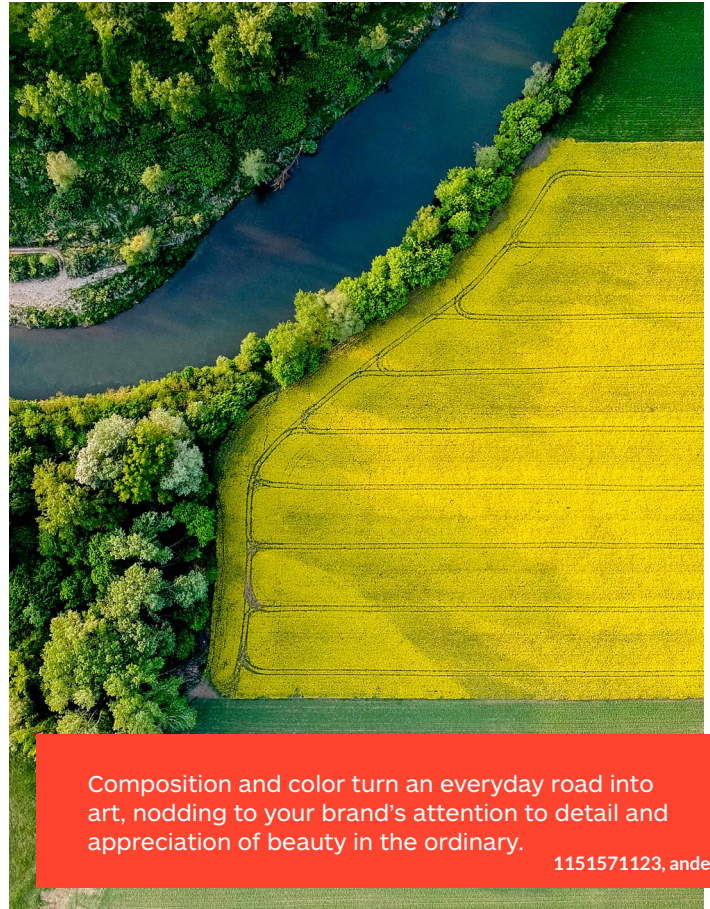
You may have already come across the term “look and feel” when it comes to branding and marketing. It refers to the overall visual impact made by your design decisions as a whole. As we’ll see later on in [Deciding on Details](#) and [Picking a Palette](#), everything from the colors you choose to the typefaces you employ influences this, but it goes beyond visuals alone.

The “feel” usually refers to how things like buttons and menus work on your site, but it’s also constructed by your copy and tone of voice as much as your aesthetic.

Photography

An effectively curated selection of images may feature a range of portraits, landscapes, interiors, exteriors, nature, and beyond. But regardless of subject matter, their specific look will tell a unified story.

This can be achieved by paying particular attention to elements like lighting, composition, and color and ensuring that each shot you choose follows a certain set of visual guidelines that reflect your brand.



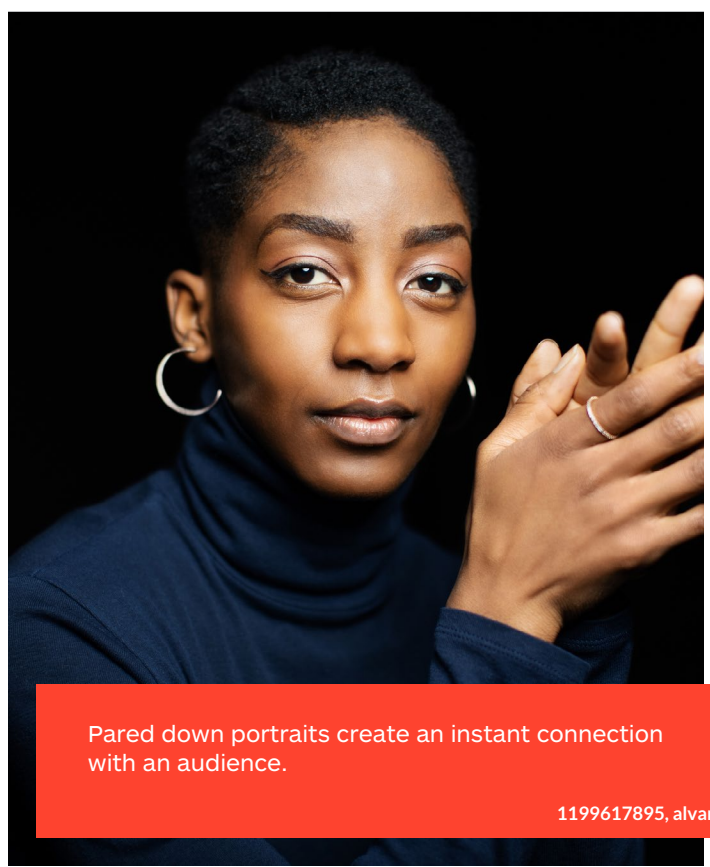
Composition and color turn an everyday road into art, nodding to your brand's attention to detail and appreciation of beauty in the ordinary.

1151571123, anderm



This bright and casual interior sends a message that's much different from the low-lit room seen on page 14. Which makes more sense for your brand?

1194948894, zoombull



Pared down portraits create an instant connection with an audience.

1199617895, alvarez



Illustration

Integrating [illustrations](#) into your visual offering is a great way to further stand out and develop a unique and memorable look. Once you have a hold on your ideal photography style, put on your editorial hat and browse through iStock's [extensive graphic art collection](#), available for licensing.

Which styles might complement your existing visuals? Pops of color might work with more minimal photography, while simple line drawings could accentuate more complicated shots.

Adding illustrations to your visual mix is a great way to highlight unique color palettes and brand aesthetics.

1202344480, Lyubov Ivanova

Turn ideas into action

When you find your look, be consistent. Commit to your visual guidelines and see where they take you. Then, if you're not getting the results you want, adjust as needed.

Lighting plays a huge role in delivering the feel of a photograph. [Natural light](#) versus a [hard flash](#) creates a very different sensation; decide what works for you and stick to it for a unified look.

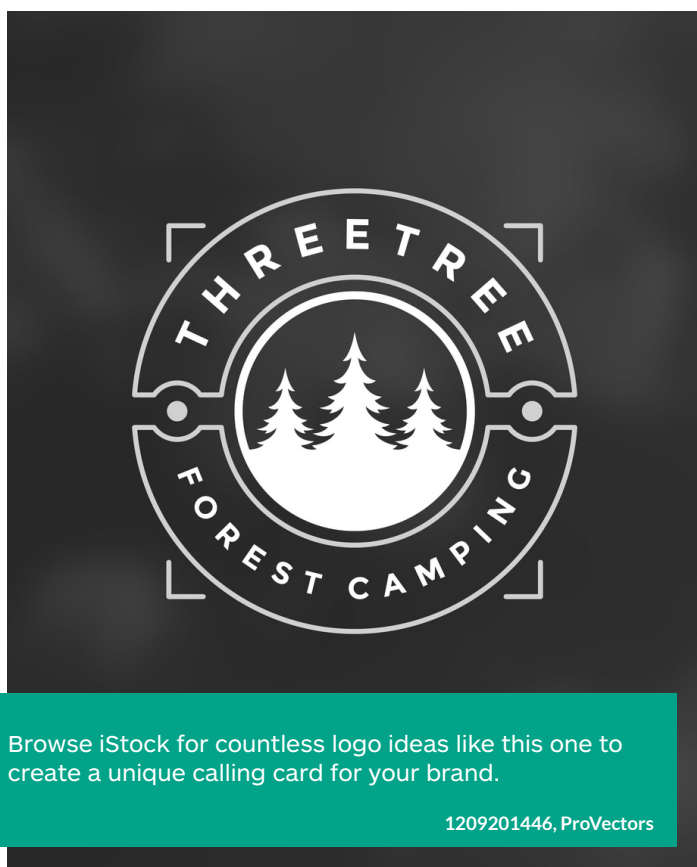
When adding illustrations to the mix, don't expect to land on the perfect combination right away. As with most creative work, a bit of experimentation is the right place to start.

1190200592, Iana Kotova

Deciding on details



1163132207, undefined



Browse iStock for countless logo ideas like this one to create a unique calling card for your brand.

1209201446, ProVectors

Logos

You don't need to hire a graphic designer to create the perfect logo for your brand. With iStock's vector images, illustrations and clip art, it's easy to [find inspiration to create the perfect symbol to represent your company.](#)

Lettering

Browse iStock [typography options](#) to look for lettering that further personalizes your brand experience. These can be used together to form full words, or apart to emphasize initials or add a drop cap to a page. Letters can also make great graphic elements and overlays for images you share on social and on-site.



1164931970, iarti



1201089459, Алёна Коваль

Block and hand-drawn letters (see above and left) make a bold statement when used in brand marketing, as do all sorts of unique typographical elements (see below).



1185797197, teddyandmia



Iconography

iStock has a [wide array of iconography](#) available for licensing which lets you add another branded touch to various pages and posts on your website and other platforms. These tiny images can be used to bolster your look and quickly communicate an idea or topic in a way that's immediately recognizable to your readership.

Practical icons like these offer instant, easy-to-read cues for your audience.

1206786449, Nadiinko

Turn ideas into action

Logos should be simple and easily recognizable at any size. Whip out a piece of paper and see where the pen takes you. When you're finished brainstorming, see if you can recreate your vision digitally.

Too many fonts get distracting and overwhelm the eye. Limit yourself to two or three tops and use the most eye-catching one of the group more sparingly.

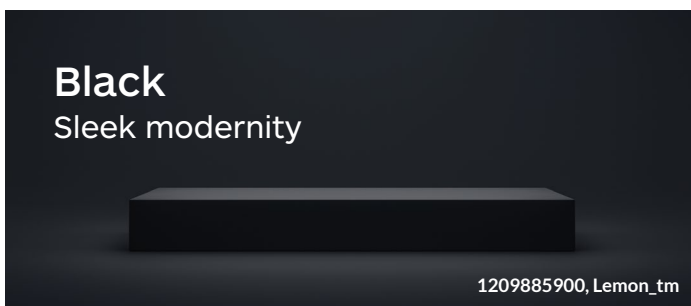
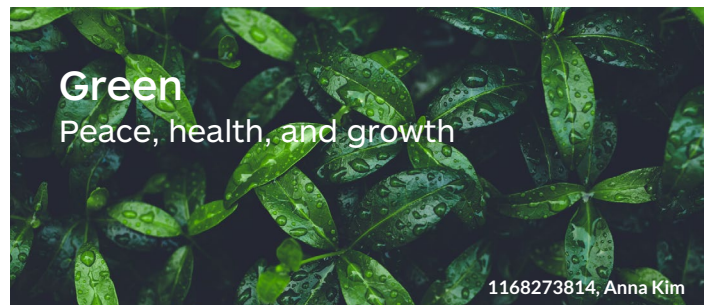
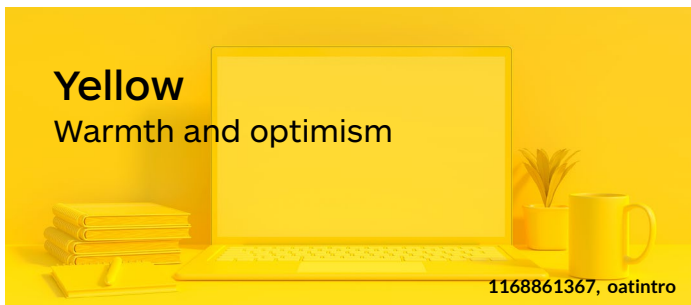
Be purposeful when using iconography and always go for a larger visual when possible. Icons make a relevant accent that can make reading easier, but they can't replace a powerful image.

1208767689, AnnaStills

Picking a palette

What colors mean

When it comes to business and marketing, it's important to [review the psychology of colors](#) (Hubspot's infographic makes it quick and easy to understand). Here's what the most common ones mean:



Which to choose

Selecting accent hues or an overall color scheme depends on your brand personality. Don't go for a certain tone just because it's your favorite. Consult a handy guide like Hubspot's to make sure you're on the right track and that your colors are communicating the message you actually intend them to be.



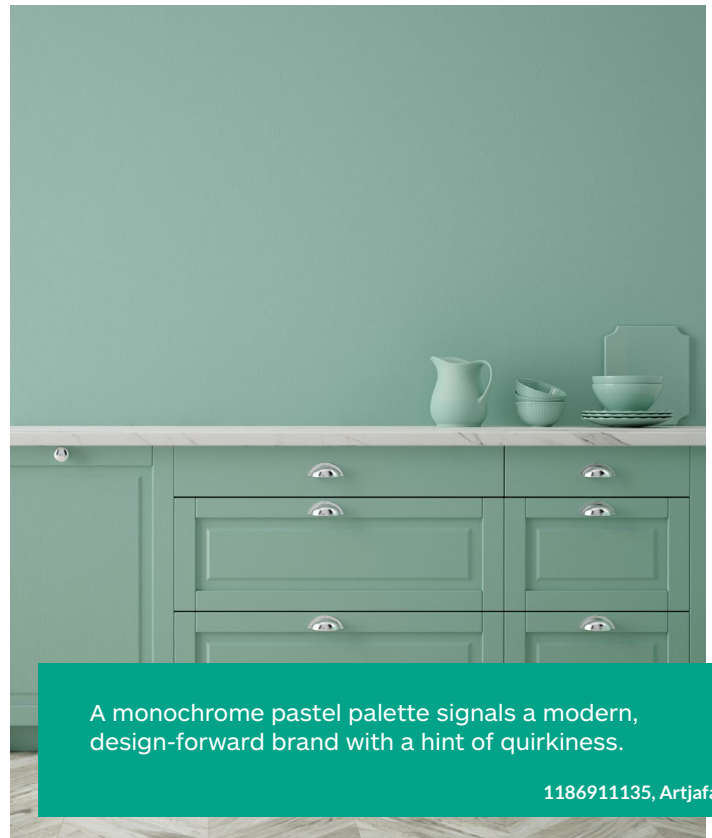
Darker neutrals and gem tones communicate a sense of luxury when used in branding.

1248298343, alvarez



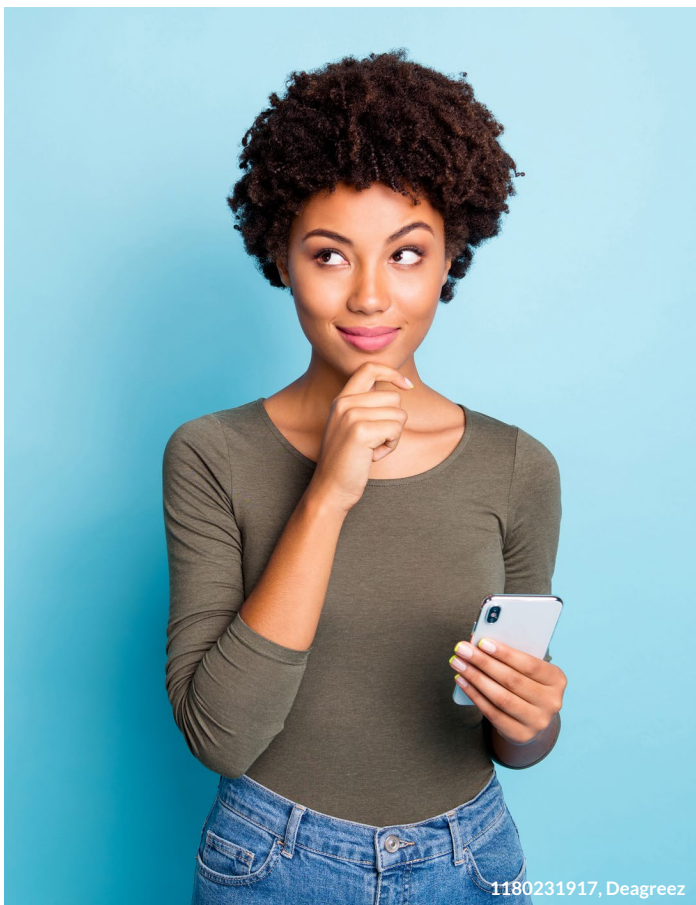
Simple but powerful colors—or lack thereof—can give a brand a heightened sense of sophistication.

1160744745, Jose Juan Garcia



A monochrome pastel palette signals a modern, design-forward brand with a hint of quirkiness.

1186911135, Artjafara



How to use them

There are so many opportunities to inject a consistent color theme throughout your site and brand communications. From email marketing to blog design, social posts, and landing pages, envision your messaging as a canvas that connects your brand's visual language across everything you touch. Icons, typography, imagery, borders, and beyond can all become the tools with which you paint it.

Turn ideas into action

Bookmark a relevant source for quick reference when thinking about how best to infuse color into your brand—and don't forget to check out what's working for your competition.

Apply your research to your choices, then see what your audience responds to. If you're not hitting your goals, keep searching for that sweet spot.

Tints and filters are a quick and easy way to brand any image. With [iStock Editor](#) you don't even have to leave the site to make it happen.

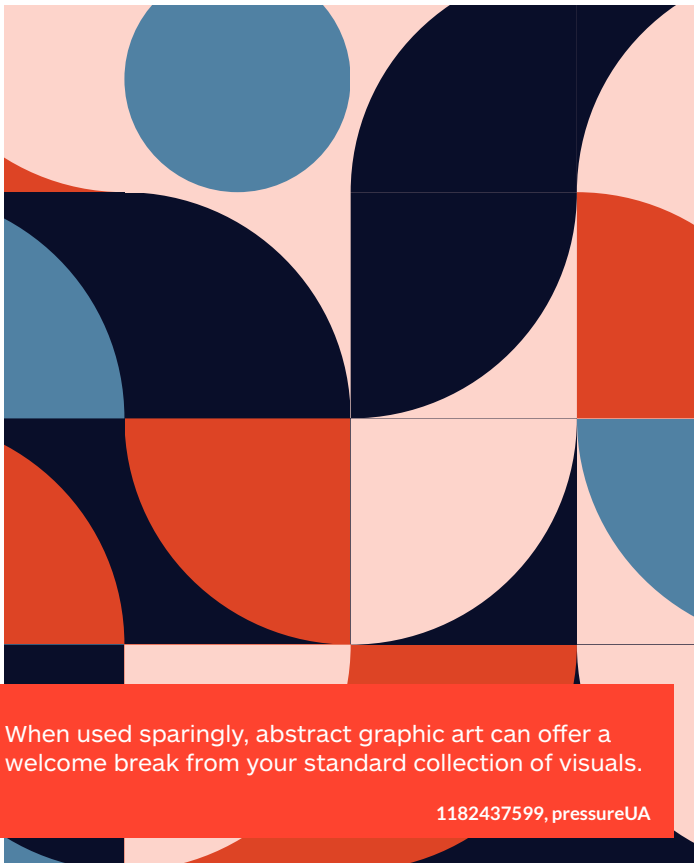
Your brand colors can also serve as eye-catching borders or frames for various kinds of content.

1166684037, cookelma

Stand out with...



1177385307, baona



When used sparingly, abstract graphic art can offer a welcome break from your standard collection of visuals.

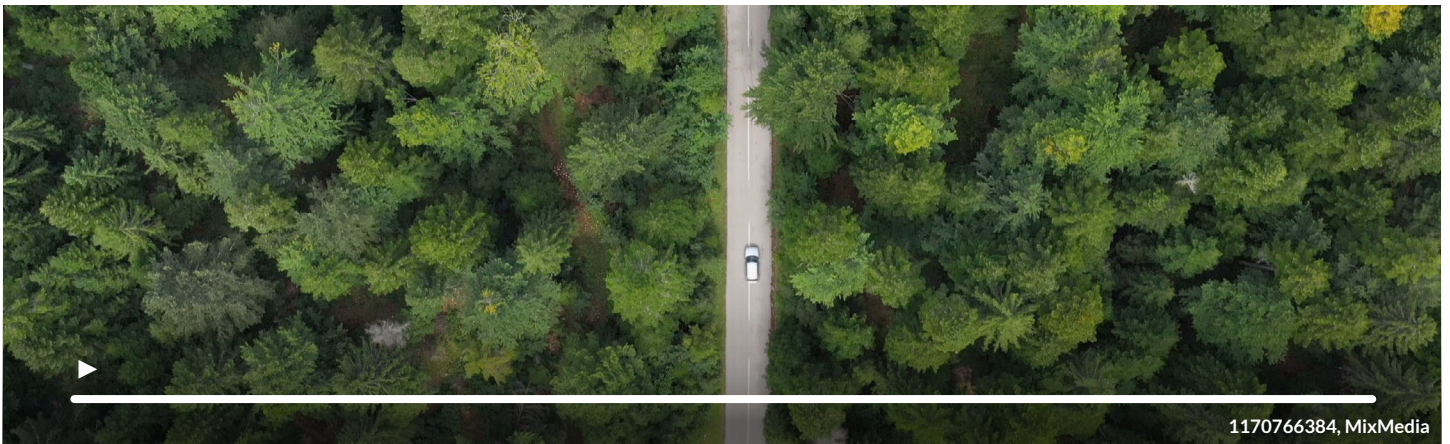
1182437599, pressureJA

Patterns + textures

iStock's expansive collection of photography and illustrations has a section that's [dedicated to textures and patterns available for licensing](#). These rich images can work wonders as backgrounds, frames, and other decorative accents. From [florals](#) and fabrics to [metallics](#), [abstracts](#), [animal prints](#), and more, you'll be sure to find something that speaks your brand language.

Videos + GIFs

A moving image captures a viewer's attention instantly. License an element from [iStock's GIFs and videos](#) to enhance your website, social media, and email marketing efforts, but don't overwhelm your audience. And remember: just because they're not stills, doesn't mean they don't have to fit your look. With so much material to choose from, there's no excuse for a non-cohesive aesthetic.





Vector drawings

A simple vector image grants creative flexibility and can be a great addition to any page or piece of content. Unlike other illustrations, vectors are made up of points, lines, and curves that make it possible for them to go as small or large as you like without losing quality. [Try one as a creative alternative](#) for anything from a favicon to a header image.

Anything is possible in illustration; a vector image can communicate an idea in ways some photos cannot.

1207202567, Ponomariova_Maria

Turn ideas into action

When it comes to patterns and textures, less is more. Use them sparingly and don't mix and match too much—unless it makes sense for your brand aesthetic.

Videos and GIFs are great to add to emails, headers, backgrounds, or articles. They make a viewer stop and stare and can illustrate a point in an unexpected way.

Vector art can convey abstract ideas in a way photography sometimes can't. Complicated topics like those in tech and finance, for instance, can benefit from the simplification this kind of image can provide.

1214287845, smartboy10

In summary

These days, audiences expect to be wowed. Your visual appearance leaves a lasting impression. To make sure it's a positive one that keeps them coming back for more, visual language and identity are key. Keep it consistent, fine-tune it to your specific company values, and your viewers will begin to connect your aesthetic with what you have to offer.

Once you have your guidelines in place, be sure to tell a unified story across platforms, so that your audience knows it's you no matter where they cross your path. Above all, remember to keep the big picture in mind—and that for all the others, there's iStock.

[Visit iStock online](#) to explore all we have to offer, and hang on to the helpful Visual Identity Checklist at the end of this eBook.

Visual Identity 101: Checklist

A powerful visual language builds brand awareness and memorability—and it can boost business results, too. In fact, **Forbes**¹ reports that a “consistent brand presentation across all platforms increases revenue by up to 23%.” Use this handy guide to make sure you’re making the most of your visuals—and visit **iStock** for all your photo, illustration, and video needs.

Basics

- Choose three words to describe your brand personality. Does your visual identity reflect these words/ideas/concepts?
- Do your brand visuals reflect these words/ideas/concepts?
- Do these visuals speak to your audience/customer base?

Palette

- Have you reviewed **common color connotations in marketing psychology**?²
- Do your color choices reflect your brand personality?
- Is there a hierarchy or organizational structure in place for how you use your color choices on your site?
- Do you have a consistent color scheme throughout your site, social media accounts, and marketing collateral?

Pop

Are you incorporating...

- Frames or borders?
- Tints or filters?
- Videos or GIFs?
- Illustrations or vectors?
- Patterns or textures?

Details

- Is your logo simple, unique, and easily recognizable?
- Do your font choices reflect the overall look and feel of your brand?
- Are you limiting your typographical choices to 2-3 fonts?
- Are you using iconography to communicate ideas and organize information?
- Are you overdoing it with icons or emojis? Use sparingly, where meaningful and relevant.

Style

- Are you developing a look and feel that’s unique to your brand?
- Does the bulk of your imagery on-site and across social adhere to your chosen palette?
- When assembled, does your image selection tell a cohesive story?
- Is the lighting similar in most of your curated photography?
- Do your illustrations follow a consistent visual style?

iStock
by Getty Images™

¹<https://www.forbes.com/sites/gabrielshao/2018/08/10/10-marketing-web-design-branding-statistics-to-help-you-prioritize-business-growth-initiatives/#54643593d708>

² <https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/psychology-of-color>