

PBS Logo Research Paper

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PBS has been broadcasting to the public ever since they replaced NET (National Education Television) in 1970. This was thanks to the help of Carnegie Corporation President John

Gardner and Vice President Alan Pifer. They were both in the business of trying to find a way to fund public stations. They both created the Carnegie Commission on Educational Television and began to study how to improve public broadcasting as a whole. They came up with the idea to create a corporation that helped get government funding through to public stations. Dr. Gardner brought the plan to President Johnson but wasn't put into effect until 1967. The Public Broadcasting Act was finally in effect, resulting in the creation of the CPB (Corporation for Public Broadcasting). As a result, PBS was created. Their focus was to adhere to the public and their choice of the logo reflects their message. Their evolution in logo design is very linear but still nonetheless a good example of good brand representation.

The PBS logo has gone through many different changes before it could get to the iconic logo that we all know and



recognize today. The early version of the PBS logo debuted when PBS replaced National Education Television (NET) in 1970. The logo was simple but too simple. It read "Public Broadcasting Service" in Helvetica typeface in red, blue, and yellow letters. The creativity of this logo is nonexistent. It lacked representation of what brand PBS is. This was for a reason. They only needed a temporary logo so people would know who the successor to NET was. They quickly found Ernie Smith and Herb Lubalin to help with their identity problem. The logo was scraped and replaced a year later.



The first problem that PBS had with the previous logo was that many people were confusing PBS with being a local channel instead of a national channel. With the help of Ernie Smith and Herb Lubalin, PBS was finally able to represent who they were and who they do their work for, The public. Lubalin went through many different ideas before he reached the final product. His team and he went through ideas that focused on America as a whole. The first logos consisted of stars, eagles, stripes, etc. Themes that give off “National”. PBS liked the idea of that but they rejected many of them due to some choices being representative of certain things they did not believe. Lubalin later focused on the idea of “Public”. He decided to make the letter P be a human head to represent “the people”. This logo ran on television from 1971 to 1984. The typeface was then created by Ernie Smith and Herb Lubalin. They named it ITC Avant Garde Gothic. The logo was later brought back as *PBS Digital Studios*’ logo in 2014.



PBS decided it was time to take a different approach with their logo. They focused on changing the direction the human head is facing and the logo design instead of the “PBS” abbreviation. When they were presented with the design by Lubalin, PBS had concerns about the head being red and facing to the left due to them having a reputation as a “liberal network”. They settled on making the head blue but facing to the left due to the fact that the nose would be going right against the B. In 1984, PBS reached out to Chermayeff & Geismar to attack the problem of the head facing the left. Chermayeff & Geismar turned the head to the other side but also added 2 other head outlines to represent the Public in “Public Broadcasting Service”. The typeface used is called Lubalin Graph Demi created by Lubalin specifically for PBS. This was the end of “Public Broadcasting Service” to the shortened “PBS”.



The logo went under another change in 1998. The triple head was kept the same but was placed inside of a black circle. This gave PBS a look that was more printable. This could be used as more of a logo than anything else that they have come up with before. It had a more trademark feel when the head was placed in the black circle. The Serif style “PBS” was then placed right next to the circle with the triple “P-Head”. The logo was designed by Publicis and Hal Rainey. The design is very timeless and is even still used to represent PBS.



Coming into the present, we see that the new logo has had some minor changes but stays the same in concept. The human head from the previous logo has had some change around the nose with it being rounded out and given a softer more modern look. The font of the “PBS” has also been given a more modern effect by changing it from a classic serif typeface to a san-serif typeface. This definitely is a good change because it shows how they want to represent the “educational” and “simple” approach that they are very much known for. The logo has also been altered in color from its simple black to a blue. The use of this cool color helps represent calmness and a willingness to learn. It pairs well with the new rounded edges of the “P-Head”

When it came to logos and a good representation of a brand, PBS is definitely in the upper echelon of that category. Their logo portrayed their message well but also left plenty of room for improvement in the future. The brand was represented as something for the people, so the choice of the logo was perfect.

**Resources**

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