

# Implementation of the Graphic Standard of the Technical University - Sofia, Plovdiv Branch

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**Abstract.** In today's world of visual communication, it is of paramount importance for every organization or brand to have a clear and consistent graphic standard. The graphic standard is a set of rules, guidelines, and design elements that define the visual representation of the brand or organization. It includes details such as the logo, color scheme, fonts, image style, and other visual elements that work together to create a unified and recognizable image. As part of a project funded by the Internal Competition of the Technical University - Sofia in 2022, a graphic identity and graphic standard were created for the Technical University - Sofia, Plovdiv Branch. This article examines the integration of the graphic standard into key elements of visual communication and the development of a clear and consistent vision for the Branch.

**Key Words.** graphic design, visual identity, visual communication, graphic standard, brand management, branding, logo, font, typography, Technical University - Sofia, Plovdiv Branch

## THE GRAPHIC IDENTITY OF THE BRANCH: A NECESSARY STEP TOWARDS ESTABLISHING PRESENCE AND ATTRACTING STUDENTS

In the era of globalization and competition in education, the graphic identity of the Technical University - Sofia, Plovdiv Branch, plays a crucial role in attracting students and maintaining the institution's reputation. The graphic identity represents the core values, culture, mission, and vision of the University, reflected in all aspects of its activities, from educational programs to marketing campaigns and interaction with society.

It is important for the graphic identity of the Branch to be clearly defined, consistent, and appealing to the target audience. It should be reflected not only in the visual appearance such as the logo, color palette, and fonts but also in communication, management style, the quality of educational services, and student experience.

One of the key elements of the Branch's graphic identity is its mission and values. It should have a clearly defined mission that guides the institution's goals and strategy. The values of the Branch, such as innovation, academic freedom, diversity, and social engagement, should also be clearly communicated and applied in all aspects of university activities.

The visual identity of Plovdiv Branch is also crucial for its brand reputation. The logo, color palette, typography, and other visual elements should be designed to reflect uniqueness and professionalism. They should be used consistently in all marketing materials, websites, social media, and advertising campaigns of the Branch.

Communication with students, faculty, staff, and society is also an important aspect of identity. The Branch should develop effective communication strategies that ensure transparency, openness, and active involvement of everyone interested in its academic life and development.

## DEVELOPMENT OF VISUAL IDENTITY AND GRAPHIC STANDARD OF THE TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY - SOFIA, PLOVDIV BRANCH

Graphic identity is one of the most powerful tools for achieving desired impact on the consumers of a given product or service. Developed according to the rules and principles of design - well-grounded and professionally crafted in

line with the goals and objectives set - undoubtedly ensures a sustainable presence by achieving a strong image. It is precisely the image that gives identity to the brand and leaves a deep impression through its visual power, emotional connection, and recognizability.

The development of graphic identity, encompassing multiple elements to make the Technical University - Sofia, Plovdiv Branch, a recognizable brand and presenting them in the form of a graphic standard, builds a clear and consistent vision of the Branch, to be used by all levels and across all communication channels.

The main challenge in this project is the involvement of many people (teachers, students, doctoral students, and staff), where organizing numerous creative projects and ideas into a unified graphic standard represents an incredible effort on the part of all participants.

To achieve the main goal, joint efforts have been made and ideas have been collected from a group of people, mainly students and teachers from the "Design and Print Communications" specialty. The main task is to create a visual, graphic identity and design the guidelines by gathering all projects and necessary information, systematizing them, adding new ideas to the work process, and leaving room for expansion and enhancement of the established vision.

By creating a brand manual (brand book), a sequence, standards, and guidelines have been established through which the brand can have a precisely defined identity and position, both in the business sphere and in the social environment. To be effective, every brand must be consistent. [1]

## IMPLEMENTATION OF THE GRAPHIC STANDARD IN THE ELEMENTS OF VISUAL COMMUNICATION

The benefits of implementing the graphic standard are numerous – unified presentation, easy recognition, improved visual communication, professional appearance, and a stronger brand. It not only enhances the brand's image but also facilitates the work of marketing, design, and communication teams. However, its imposition requires a clear plan, willingness, and cooperation at all levels - from management, through teachers and staff, to students and all organizations within the university.

Several key steps are necessary for the successful implementation of a graphic standard in an organization:

1. Designing the graphic standard: The starting point in creating a graphic identity is to standardize the logo, its variations and usage, create a color palette, devise typography, and design a set of basic visual elements of the identity. These elements should be presented in a visual standard, serving as a guide for consistent application of the graphic style across various materials of the organization.
2. Creating a brand identity manual (brand book): This document describes all visual elements of the graphic standard, such as rules for logo usage, color combinations, fonts, design composition, and other details. This document is essential for maintaining consistency and uniformity of the graphic style in all materials.
3. Integration into all channels of communication: The graphic standard must be integrated into all types of advertising materials of the organization, including website, social media, print materials (brochures, business cards, posters, etc.), electronic documents, and more.
4. Team training: All team members responsible for creating and using the organization's materials should be trained and proficient with the graphic standard. This includes employees, teachers, marketing specialists, designers, etc.
5. Regular review, expansion, and updating: The graphic standard is not static - it can change over time, expand depending on the organization's needs, or be updated along with design trends. Therefore, it is important to regularly review and update the graphic standard to ensure its relevance and compliance with contemporary trends.



**SCHEME 1.** Steps for the successful implementation of a graphic standard

The successful implementation of a graphic standard requires commitment and collaboration from the entire team, aiming to maintain high consistency and professionalism in the visual presentation of the organization.

At the moment, the Technical University - Sofia, Plovdiv Branch, has started the journey and successfully completed the first two steps, and now we are working on steps three and four. Step five is part of the future plans for the revision and expansion of the Graphic Standard of the Technical University - Sofia, Plovdiv Branch.

## PRESENTATION OF STEP THREE OF IMPLEMENTING THE GRAPHIC STANDARD OF THE TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY - SOFIA, PLOVDIV BRANCH:

### Website

The website is an integral part of the modern university environment and plays a key role in communication, representation, and development of the Branch. It provides valuable information for students, strengthens the identity and image of the Branch, and also creates a platform for active interaction among all participants in the educational process. This fact distinguishes the website of the Technical University - Sofia, Plovdiv Branch as exceptionally important for achieving academic and societal influence.

In the construction of the new website of the Branch, the brand book was utilized by an external company and external graphic and web designers, greatly improving and facilitating communication. Emphasis and strong impact are achieved by adhering to the color scheme, both the official one and the one intended for communication with the youth audience - students and student candidates. Guidelines for logo usage in its various forms have been followed, the font and font combinations standardized in the brand book have been used, as well as the designed icons, which have been revised and updated for some specialties.

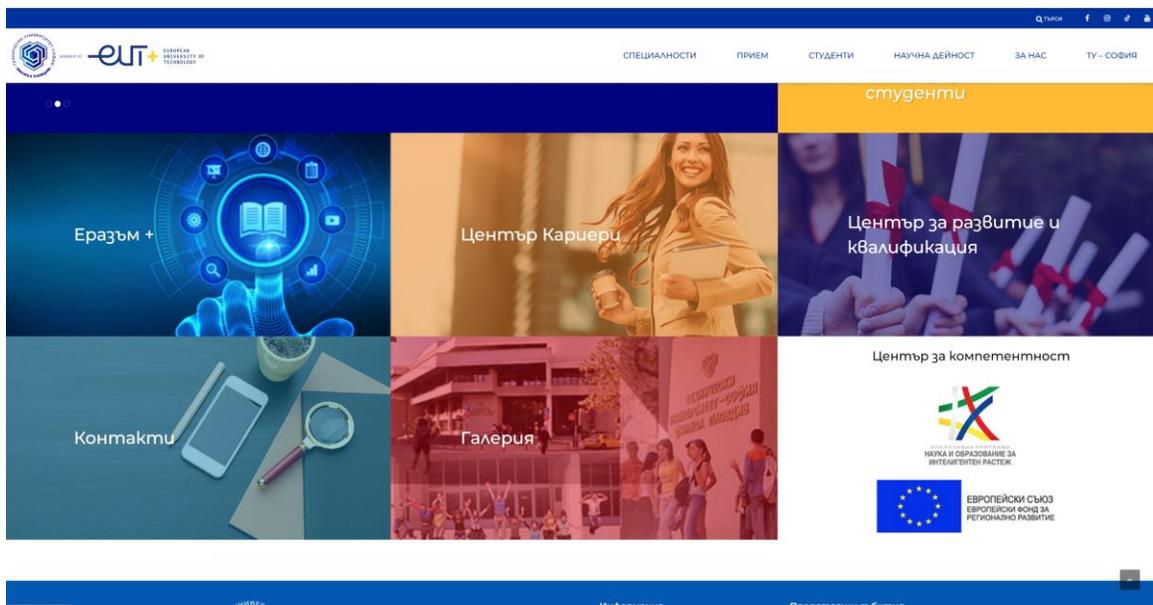


FIGURE 1. The new website of the Branch

### Business Cards

In a business card, the focus is usually on the logo - it should dominate. The overall color mood that the business card carries is also important and is part of the visual identity. Color can be present through the logo, text, graphic elements, or the paper itself. The business card itself can be one-sided or two-sided. Regarding design, three solutions have been proposed – for management, for faculty, and for the staff at the Technical University - Sofia, Plovdiv Branch. [1]

At the moment, business cards have been implemented only at the management level and partially for faculty members. It is of paramount importance for the visual identity of the branch to integrate standardized business cards and to encourage management and faculty to use them regularly when participating in events, conferences, student recruitment campaigns, etc. Consistency in design and use of business cards will contribute to the consolidation of the brand and the public significance of the branch.



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**FIGURE 2.** Business cards and e-mail signature

## Email Signatures

When it comes to consistency and affiliation, one of the most effective and budget-friendly methods is the use of a standardized and stylized email signature. These signatures are developed and described in the graphic standard. Affiliated individuals (faculty, staff, students, etc.) should be encouraged to use branded signatures in all correspondence related to the Technical University - Sofia, Plovdiv Branch, both from their official and personal email accounts.

## Letterheads

The letterhead is a primary medium for written correspondence. It should possess individuality without unnecessary assertiveness or pretentiousness, be simple yet not overly so. The most effective result is achieved through skillful emphasis on the logo compared to less significant elements. However, simplicity is essential, regardless of the chosen approach, as the role of the letterhead is primarily to convey information. [2]

Three types of letterheads for letters and reports have been designed, each serving a different purpose - formal, official, and working, each with distinct designs.

Given that the Technical University - Sofia, Plovdiv Branch is a complex structure, the letterheads should reflect it in the best way possible and aid in visualizing its components. All letterheads are designed in three variations – University + Branch, University + Branch + Faculty, University + Branch + Faculty + Department.

The purpose of the formal letterhead is to be used in appropriate situations, such as sending congratulatory addresses, decrees for ceremonial events, etc. It features a symmetrical, centered design, suitable for the purpose, with an emphasis on the Branch's logo.

The official letterhead is intended for both external and internal communication that requires the necessary seriousness of the message. It has a strict, classic design, including a header, address in the footer, and a watermark with the University's logo.

The working letterhead has the simplest design, with all information placed only in the upper part (header), and the logo, text, and contact information are asymmetrically balanced.



**FIGURE 3.** Three types of letterheads of the Branch

## Print Advertising Materials

Print advertising materials further contribute to the visual representation and positioning of the Branch within the highly competitive educational environment. They not only provide important information about the educational programs and opportunities offered by the Branch but also create an image that reinforces the uniqueness and quality of the institution. In this context, the use of print advertising materials is of paramount importance for the successful positioning of the branch in the education market.



FIGURE 4. Advertising materials for the Branch

Utilizing the developed brand book, the following advertising materials have been created - posters, flyers, brochures, folders, bags, pens, calendars, banners.



FIGURE 5. Advertising materials for the Branch, Students career forum

## PLANNED EXPANSION OF THE GRAPHIC STANDARD

### Title Pages of Course Papers and Theses

Title pages hold specific significance in the context of visual identity, serving as a gateway to the content of scholarly work. Consistently branding these pages is important for making a first impression and establishing a visual style. Consequently, integrating the graphic standard of the Technical University - Sofia, Plovdiv Branch, and preparing templates for title pages for student and doctoral written works are prioritized.

A similar branded template is currently being used in the DPC specialty. Since its implementation, a significant improvement in the consistency of student papers has been observed, as well as in the identity and recognizability of the specialty.



FIGURE 6. Students documentation

As a basis of the design of Title Pages should be used the design of the letterhead with the logo at the top of the page. It is important to maintain a visual hierarchy among the mandatory elements on the page. The layout should include all mandatory elements such as the type of scientific research, topic, student/doctoral candidate name, supervisor, etc. It is desirable to use the main font of the Technical University - Sofia, Plovdiv Branch – Montserrat. The prepared and approved templates by the branch management should be uploaded to the website under the electronic resources and/or documents section, and students should be encouraged to actively use them.

### Freshman and Graduate Handbooks

Handbooks are compilations of essential data in a given field that are frequently used. They aim to summarize, educate, and facilitate individuals. The content should be simple and easy to follow. Images, graphs, and illustrations can enhance the understanding of information. Designing handbooks is an important process that involves creating and formatting information resources that are useful and easily understandable by the target audience. Handbooks should be easily updatable to align with the latest trends and information.



FIGURE 7. Students Handbooks designs

## Branded Exterior Banners

In highly developed and multicultural societies, symbols of national identity often play a key role in shaping individual and collective consciousness. One of the most effective elements of visual communication concerning affiliation and solidarity is the flag.

Studies in social psychology support this aspect, demonstrating that the flag can contribute to strengthening the sense of engaging to a particular group or community. The visual representation of the flag enhances the positive evaluation of the group and belonging to it. [3] This effect is due to the phenomenon of social identity, whereby individuals associate themselves with the group they believe they belong to, resulting in increased feelings of satisfaction and self-esteem.

Additionally, the flag can be a powerful symbol of community and solidarity. Visual contact with the flag of the community to which one belongs while performing tasks directly related to it, improves their emotional reactions and increases their propensity for cooperation and solidarity. [4]

Creating striking large flags based on the graphic identity and placing them on the facades of the academic buildings and student dormitories would have a positive effect on students' and faculty members' sense of belonging and would add a sense of public significance to the completion of their daily tasks.

The background of the flags should be the main color of the Technical University - Sofia, Plovdiv Branch, while the logo and the branch slogan could be in silver.



FIGURE 8. Some examples of branded banners

## Branding of the Interior of the Campus

In contemporary university life, the campus plays the role of a second home for students. One of the key strategies for fostering a sense of identity and belonging to the university is the branding of the campus interior. This process involves using specific colors, logos, and other identity elements to create a unique and memorable atmosphere.

Branding the interior of the campus has an extremely positive influence on students. Studies show that well-designed and branded space can improve the learning process and academic performance of students. [5] When students feel connected to the university and identify with its brand, they are more motivated to achieve good results and be active participants in university affairs.

Additionally, branding the interior of the campus can improve the quality of life for students outside the academic sphere. Well-designed space can create a cozy and inspiring atmosphere that stimulates social interactions and cultural exchange among students. Areas for information exchange, relaxation, exhibitions, etc., can be designated.

Branding the interior of the campus plays a key role in attracting and retaining students. When potential students visit the campus and feel the atmosphere and identity of the university, they are more motivated to choose to study there. Additionally, well-branded space can increase the loyalty of current students and predispose them positively towards the university, which can contribute to their satisfaction and fulfillment with the learning process.

## Designing an Effective Logo system for the Branch

Logos today evolve; a logo is no longer a single symbol that governs the brand. Of course, there is always one logo at the core, but with today's dynamic visual landscape and high competition to reach the audience, there is a need for a logo system. Some brands require a huge logo system; others require a very small one. Building an effective logo

system for the Technical University - Sofia, Plovdiv Branch, should include all parts of the structure – the two faculties, departments and specialties, and additional units. Considering that the Branch itself is part of an even larger structure, it is most logical for this logo system to be based on the main logo of the University. Developing such a system will contribute to a cohesive and unified visual identity for the entire university, fostering recognition and trust among all individuals involved. By incorporating various elements of the institution into the logo system, it will enhance brand consistency across all communication channels and strengthen the institution's position in the competitive academic landscape.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the graphic identity of the Branch is a key element for its positioning in the education market and for attracting students and faculty. With proper management and development, the Branch's brand can become a symbol of quality, innovation, and social responsibility, contributing to its successful growth and prosperity in the future. The implementation and active use of the elements described in the material of the graphic standard will emphasize the uniqueness of the Branch and provide it with a competitive advantage. Lastly, a consistent visual identity will facilitate the integration of students and academic staff into the whole and strengthen the sense of belonging. A systematic upgrade is exceptionally important as it ensures that the visual representation aligns with the evolving needs and goals of the institution. Moreover, ongoing evaluation and refinement of the graphic standards will enable the Branch to adapt to changing circumstances and maintain its position as a leader in education and innovation.

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