

**By BRR Principal Brian Richards – 20 April 2010**

# Living in Logoland

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# Living in Logoland :

## LAPSES IN BRAND THINKING

**On February 18th a public competition was launched to come up with a logo for the new 'Super-City' Auckland Council. For a city claiming to have a visionary future, this seems remarkably short-sighted. Time is ticking, the protagonists say, and a logo is needed urgently for legal reasons. Even so, the decision to throw the logo out to all-comers without any brief, indicates a complete lack of understanding of brands and a misguided belief that by avoiding the usual costs for professional brand and logo development, they won't be criticised by the voters. In life, however, you generally get what you pay for.**

Such competitions are undoubtedly growing in popularity with everybody having a crack at our national flag, designing the Rugby World Cup's 'party central' and Auckland's viaduct's bridges. We love to use this 'survivor island' approach.

**So, on behalf of the Super-City, we are going to hold a design carnival, without any hint of a central ethos or brand strategy. How are we going to rationalise the outcome when we finally see it plastered all over the newspaper and the bitching inevitably begins?**

This competition is yet another example of our inability to acknowledge best practice, refusing to allow anyone to be 'better able'. We constantly point out that the tall-poppy syndrome is holding us back while bowing to the inevitable pressure whenever hard decisions have to be made.

In a region scarcely renowned for its cohesiveness, the new Super-City represents a real opportunity to offer a more united front to the country and the world. Creating a brand that articulates that and carefully translates it into design that aligns the Auckland proposition in terms of business, tourism and community, is what's required.

It seems difficult to see any reason for this competition other than a desire to take the easy way out, rather than argue the selection of the correct expertise to achieve a professional and lasting outcome. There is clearly a desire to be able to say 'It wasn't my fault'.

With the greatest respect to the judging panel selected, it's hard to see why the leaders of New Zealand's design fraternity have not been engaged. New Zealand has a design industry that is crying out for the opportunity here, to put its experience and sound professional judgement to use.

**We're turning ourselves into a cliché with our 'number eight wire' approach. We're saying "She'll be right", as we turn a piece of work that will be reflected across Auckland into a beauty contest at best. This is design by democracy. Visual wallpaper that may well look pleasing to the eye but will fail to truly distil and capture the many elements the Super-City stands for. It appeals to our great egalitarian sense of fair play, while invariably resulting in mediocrity.**

Don't tell me that this haphazard strategy was part of the renewal of Glasgow, Montréal, Seattle or Berlin. This is the exact instance where a logo will not be just a logo. In 1953 when Spain's President of Commerce was looking for a symbol for the country's tourism, he visited Joan Miro in hospital. Using all his creativity and insights, Joan designed the symbol in one hour, a few days before he passed away. This is his lasting legacy to his beloved Spain.

Can we not look to our very best acknowledged designers to leave us a legacy for this beautiful city? Admittedly, it won't be for free but if you consider that every kilometre of motorway in the city costs between \$10 million and \$80 million, it doesn't seem much to spend a fraction of this to determine Auckland's emotional infrastructure.