



Alan Siegel

EDITORS' NOTE *Over five decades, Alan Siegel has gained the stature of both pillar of the establishment and provocative iconoclast while building Siegel+Gale, one of the leading global brand consultancies. In 2011, he created Siegelvision, a new company focused on solving tough branding and communications problems for purpose-driven organizations. Over the course of his career, he has created brand identity programs and simplified communications for a wide range of prestigious companies and organizations including American Express, Major League Baseball and the National Basketball Association (NBA), the U.S. Tennis Association, Carnegie Mellon University, The New School, Caterpillar, 3M, U.S. Air Force, Dell, Xerox, and the IRS. He has written extensively on branding and the importance of simplicity as a competitive advantage for The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, and The New York Law Journal and has appeared nationally on ABC News, CNN, and the Today show. He is the author of a series of personal guides for The Wall Street Journal, including the best seller The Wall Street Journal Guide to Money and Markets. Siegel's latest book, Simple: Conquering the Crisis of Complexity, was released in April 2013 to critical acclaim and named a "Best Business Book of 2013" by Booz & Company. In 2006, Jorge Pinto Books published Alan Siegel: On Branding and Clear Communications by Louis J. Slovisky as part of its Working Biographies series. A graduate of Cornell University's School of Industrial and Labor Relations, Siegel also attended New York University Law School, the School of Visual Arts, and Alexei Brodovich's Design Laboratory.*

COMPANY BRIEF *Siegelvision (siegelvision.com) is an organizational identity consultancy founded by branding industry pioneer and champion of simplicity in business Alan Siegel. Siegel and his team of experienced strategists, communicators, and designers provide clear, provocative recommendations that transform organizations, inspire action, and drive results.*

How do you characterize the role of marketing companies today?

Simplicity and Clarity

**An Interview with Alan Siegel,
Chief Executive Officer, Siegelvision**

I went into the brand identity business to develop strategic solutions that made a difference. I wanted to work with senior management on projects that help companies define their purpose, develop distinctive identities and a unique voice to connect them with their employees, customers, the financial community, and media.

Initially, the business was focused on creating logos and graphic design systems. I always wanted to build an integrated voice for corporations to replace the cacophony of disconnected programs created by advertising agencies, direct response firms, and marketing, research, and public relations firms.

I'm most proud of my pioneering work in simplification. As an example, I was working with Citibank and they wanted me to redesign their forms for the retail market, which were unintelligible. I convinced them to radically simplify the organization, legal language, and format of their consumer loan note so that a consumer with a high school education could read this legal document and make an informed decision.

I then became an advocate for plain English and worked with legislators to write plain English legislation. I traveled around the country with the Practising Law Institute participating in courses to teach lawyers how to write in plain English.

I also taught a course at Fordham Law School on writing contracts in plain English and founded and built the Communication Design Center, a graduate program at Carnegie Mellon University dedicated to bringing clarity to business and government communication.

Is Siegelvision just a natural extension of Siegel+Gale?

I decided that I wanted to work for purpose-driven organizations and organizations in social justice, medicine, and education, so about three and a half years ago, I founded Siegelvision. I located an office with real character and hired several outstanding branding and marketing strategists, writers, and designers.

What does it really mean to be "purpose-driven" today?

Most companies have mission and vision statements that are vague, inflated, and indistinguishable from one another. They are bland and don't inspire any passion.

I encourage my clients to define, in a short and powerful way, who they are and what they stand for – summarizing an organizational philosophy, culture, and goals in a succinct, persuasive

statement of purpose. A statement that is meaningful, measurable, and most importantly, provides a guide for making strategic decisions.

How broad are the services you provide for those companies?

Everyone who comes in here has an identity problem, so I prefer to call Siegelvision an identity firm, not a branding firm. They need to identify who they are, what they do, what differentiates them, and how they are relevant.

We help companies define their identity and value proposition, position them, develop their supporting messages, develop their voice, clean up their structure and brand architecture, and validate that their employees and core audiences understand who they are, and that what they are communicating and promising is not only clear but credible and will generate supportive behavior.

You wrote a book called *Simple* but the work you described seems anything but that?

Simplifying complexity is hard work and actually frightens most people, even though they proclaim that they support simplicity. The process really starts with defining clarity of purpose. We define a company very succinctly and powerfully. Then it's about clarity of expression – how we connect with audiences across the platforms that exist today. The third part of building an identity is the experience – what kind of things are we doing? Are they reflecting our value proposition? We're very careful about authenticity and credibility.

The essence of this is being able to help people reinterpret who they are and not do things that are predictable but things that stand out. It's really getting down to change management by closing the gap between strategy and execution.

No matter what the company size or how complex the business, is there still a way to bring it back to this simplicity?

To be frank, only if the leadership is firmly committed to bringing simplicity to their positioning, messaging, corporate architecture, titles, and voice. I am frequently frustrated when first-rate programs lose their integrity, impact, and clarity because business leaders don't live the program and firmly support it.

How important is it for communications people to see you as a partner and not a threat?

Most communications executives hire us because of our positioning – Clarity Above All. We set up task forces of six to eight people. Not just senior people. These people work with us as partners and become ambassadors who go out and sell the program throughout the company. ●