

# AFT a case study in brand integration

“The people at CleverSpin were able to do what no one else really could. They not only brought the creative and technical expertise, but they also were able to connect with people at all levels of our organization and develop a plan and set of tools that built upon what we were already doing, but that also radically improved how people were executing the AFT brand on a daily basis.”

— Ed McElroy  
AFT President

With more than a million members and thousands of affiliate organizations across the country, The American Federation of Teachers is one of the fastest growing unions in the United States. In the Fall of 2002, AFT had some pieces of their identity, but not the brand. There were no standards in place for the use of any of the identity elements, and the variation in treatment was astonishing—close to pure chaos. The challenge to CleverSpin was not only to create a complete AFT brand and standards for use, but to also unify thousands of people in a highly autonomous organization to move in a single direction.

Employing its signature style and approach, CleverSpin blended thorough review, analysis and observation with focused, personal dialogue to build broad consensus and ensure user-friendly brand guidelines, tools and processes. In record time, the team defined the complete AFT brand and the full spectrum of communication tools that required branding. They created an all-inclusive set of standards with a corresponding series of easy to use tools to support brand consistency and integration. Most importantly, CleverSpin linked the systematic use of the brand to supporting the mission—uniting a union of professionals. The national prominence of the AFT brand is now undeniable, and its use growing dramatically at all levels of the organization.

Headquartered in Washington, DC, The American Federation of Teachers, an affiliated international union of the AFL-CIO, has more than 3,000 local affiliates nationwide, 43 state affiliates, and more than 1.3 million members within five distinct divisions. Unable to distinguish the many dedicated AFT members participating in a large rally on the Capitol Mall from anyone else in the crowd, then AFT president Sandra Feldman was prompted to call for a “sea of blue,” the official color of the AFT, thus setting in motion the AFT Identity Project.

Recognizing the importance of putting forth a clear and consistent voice to champion the AFT cause and achieve its national goals, AFT engaged CleverSpin in Fall 2002 to plan and implement an all-encompassing brand integration project. Although some pieces of the AFT identity were in place at the time, there were no standards for the use of any of the elements—logo, color, tag line, graphics, symbols, and words—and the variation in use was astonishing, close to pure chaos. Success would require a dramatic shift in the vast and complex AFT world of ideas, products, and activity, not to mention 1.3 million people accustomed to working in their own way. Uniting this magnitude of different forces into an integrated, consistent and meaningful use of the identity would be an enormous undertaking. Adding to the challenge, time was of the essence.

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Given the enormity of the undertaking, CleverSpin carved out an achievable project by starting with the leaders and staff at the DC headquarters—250 people in all. This phased approach positioned the national office to lead by example.

The CleverSpin team began by conducting a thorough review and analysis of all existing materials, products and tools to identify the critical deficiencies in the current use of the AFT identity via the logo, color, name, font and design formats. As expected, tremendous variation was found, exemplified by over 50 fax cover sheet designs, different logos used by divisions, departments and programs, and many publications with no AFT recognition at all.

Next, in-depth conversations were held with the staff to understand their respective viewpoints on the ideal direction for the AFT brand and to learn about their daily work practices, processes and challenges. In addition to building broad consensus, these conversations ensured that the tools developed for branding consistency were user-friendly, and fit well with the existing tasks and work styles of all employees.

Blending extensive review, analysis and observation with focused, personal dialogue produced a clear direction for the final step in which CleverSpin defined the complete AFT brand and the full spectrum of communication tools that required branding.



Examples of AFT collateral before the Identity Project

● The AFT message was centered on unifying the five distinct divisions—teachers, higher education faculty, school-related personnel, public employees and healthcare professionals—under one tag line: “A Union of Professionals.” With this in mind, the CleverSpin team began by defining the six key identity elements that form the complete AFT brand. They specified the identity aspects that always need to be present to achieve **consistency**. At the same time, they set the parameters to provide enough **flexibility** to distinguish the five divisions and contend with AFT’s high volume of collateral.

First and foremost, the logo and acronym with a unified labeling system replaced all previously used logos. The full organization name was assigned a secondary role in favor of the acronym as a simple way to unify diverse constituencies. Consequently, the tag line took a lead role to strengthen the AFT message. “AFT blue” was defined as well as a specific color palettes for each constituency. Precise fonts were pinpointed for use in print and electronic communications. Lastly, an arc design pattern was introduced for use on all publications to tie the design together and express a consistent look.

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**AFT Logo**  
Replaces all former logos



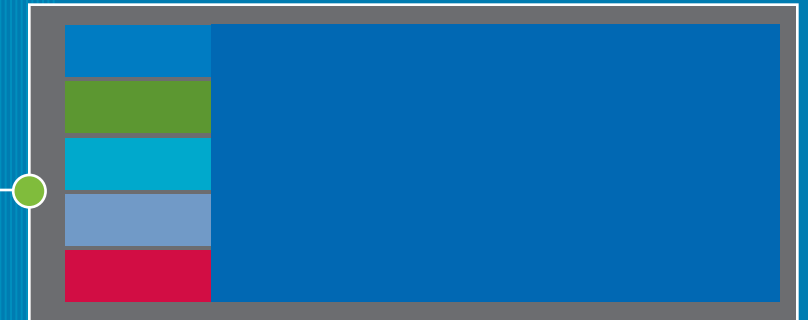
**AFT Name**  
Secondary role to unify diverse constituencies

American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO

**AFT Tag Line**  
Lead role with logo to strengthen message

*A Union of Professionals*

**AFT Blue**  
Consistent dominant color with palettes for divisions



**AFT Fonts**  
Standard use on all external communications

Utopia      Frutiger      Verdana

**AFT Design Arc**  
Pattern used to connect all publications

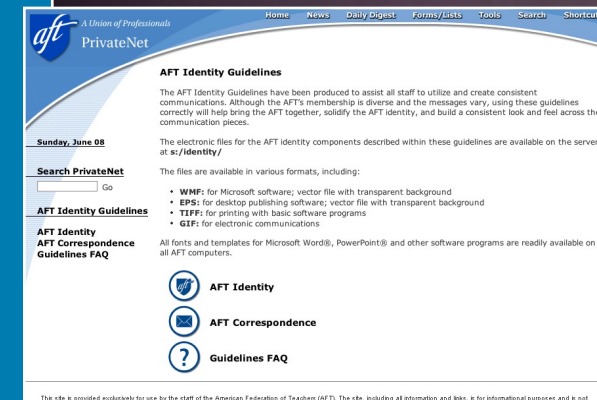


With the six key identity elements clearly defined, CleverSpin synthesized the staff interviews, survey results, their own observations, and analysis of the existing identify pieces into a comprehensive plan for integration and implementation that highlighted aggregate needs and improvement opportunities.

The solution centered on a set of binders, each one clearly establishing standards and guidelines for use of the six identity elements. The binders were packaged in a unique way so all staff could easily reference them at their desk. Like most identity development projects, all the important identity standards were defined—logo usage, clear space, color, and so forth. But that was only part one of five. CleverSpin went on to develop guidelines for every communication tool resulting in four additional brand books covering correspondence, meetings, publication design and giveaways.

As the guidelines and binders were created, feedback was continually solicited from staff to guarantee end products that would satisfy the multitude of users. Available in print, online and CD versions, the guidelines would always be there to assist staff whether they were designing a report, writing a memo, or selecting a golf ball as a giveaway.

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Above: AFT Identity guideline binders

Left: Online version of AFT guidelines

● **Producing guideline books alone does not integrate a brand.** In most cases, defining the message and developing the identity is the easy part. The difficulty tends to arise when integrating the brand throughout the entire organization—into all the communication tools—because the social environment evolves and processes change. The key lies in developing the right tools that will ease the work process when it comes to brand usage. For this reason, CleverSpin created a tool for every communication guideline. CleverSpin:

- Built **graphic files** in four formats and placed them in central location.
- Designed all **stationery** components and distributed them throughout the office by introducing **stationery boxes**.
- Created Word **correspondence templates** for letters, memos and faxes. Most of the templates offered the stationery design inside the template to ease reproduction.
- Organized a comprehensive **language guide** to provide staff with a quick reference when looking up the proper officer names, common AFT words, the AFT one-sentence description, etc.
- Developed **meeting kits** to allow staff to produce all meeting materials utilizing pre-printed stationery and templates, from name badges to agendas to certificates.
- Created a set of **PowerPoint templates** for national departments and each division.
- Systemized the design of all **banners** and **meeting signage**.
- Designed and centralized a modular **exhibit system**.
- Created Word **design templates** for brochures, trifolds and postcards.



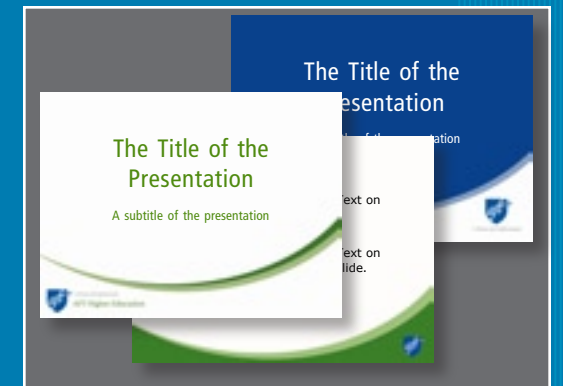
Graphic Files



Stationery and Templates



Meeting Kits



PowerPoint Templates



Banner System



Exhibit System

● To successfully distribute the guidelines and tools, it was crucial for everyone at AFT to understand the true purpose of the identity project by connecting the identity with the mission.

**The main point was not just to place the logo in the proper place, but to use the identity to communicate a unified message and professional image, thus supporting the AFT mission.** In addition, the new standards and tools would make everyone's work easier.

This message was expressed through an **internal campaign** with four sequential postcards that lead up to a launch party. The party was themed around "together" and the color blue—from the music to the food. The party gave the AFT leadership an opportunity to explain to the staff the significance of the identity project and it helped to build excitement for implementation. On the day of the party, integration began—old stationery was replaced with the new stationery boxes, new signage with the AFT mission statement was installed throughout the public areas, and templates were loaded.

Building on the momentum of the launch party, CleverSpin began mandatory **training** sessions the next day. All AFT employees were fully trained prior to receiving the identity guidelines and tools. Once training was complete, CleverSpin continued to facilitate the integration of the guidelines and tools by periodically checking in with staff. The guidelines were fine-tuned in response to ongoing staff input and a series of written responses to commonly asked questions also supported implementation.



Internal campaign postcards

**In just a few short years, the complete AFT brand is stronger than ever and growing exponentially at all levels of the organization.**

● **The entire process from research to training was completed in only six months.** Less than a year after the launch, the project's success in the form of consistent brand use was visibly evident throughout the national organization. Naturally, there is always a modicum of resistance to major organizational change, but AFT held firm to its new identity package with patience and perseverance. The leaders of AFT understand that a change of this magnitude and complexity—where many processes transform simultaneously—doesn't take place overnight. Most importantly, the AFT staff appreciates the

tools they have been given and the brand integration grows stronger each day.

Another critical indication of success is the way that state affiliates signed on quickly. With the national AFT identity clearly

established and highly visible, state organizations were eager to embrace it as their own. Connecting with a strong national identity strengthens their own presence and allows them to build off a unified and professional look. The opportunity to use the tools created in phase one radically simplified their integration process as well. Only four state pilot projects were planned for phase two, but due to sheer demand, which burgeoned without any promotion whatsoever, CleverSpin worked with more than ten affiliates. In just a few short years, the complete AFT brand is stronger than ever and growing exponentially at all levels of the organization.



Examples of AFT collateral after the Identity Project

● The integrated approach to brand, graphics, technology, and space has been the hallmark of CleverSpin. The firm coordinates executive and staff levels to gather information; to shape the direction of messages, graphics, technology, and space; and to develop easy to use tools to implement a consistent brand identity. The AFT Identity Project represented very clearly the way CleverSpin works. Our entire work process is meant to balance the strategic vision and the minute details. This is extremely time and labor intensive. But it is really the only way to positively transform an organization the size and scope of AFT.



CleverSpin is a unique studio of cross-disciplinary professionals with the breadth and depth of knowledge and experience to think strategically and execute smartly. Our advantage is uniting our expertise in graphics, technology, and architectural space to help our clients improve and expand with wisely placed investments in a results-oriented brand.

CleverSpin creates and/or capitalizes on an organization's brand. Our approach is holistic, with consideration given to a client's growth patterns and objectives, human behavior, and industry particulars. We use these parameters to integrate all aspects of brand—visual, virtual, and spatial—to ensure what an organization is, what it does, and what it says is aligned and consistent. We then provide our clients with creative, technical, and functional tools to implement the brand in ways that drive growth while constraining cost.