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Al Gore's New Logo

By STEVEN HELLER

HOW do you get people really riled up about the environment?

That is the challenge faced by Al Gore, who this year donated his $750,000 Nobel Peace Prize award (and personal matching funds) to the Alliance for Climate Protection, a nonprofit advocacy group he founded to prevent further global warming. To create a promotional campaign, which started last week, Mr. Gore commissioned the Martin Agency, a Richmond, Va., advertising firm known for its clever campaigns for Geico insurance. It asked Brian Collins, whose strategic branding firm in New York — Collins: — created the identity and overall design program for the campaign.

Here is the logo, which is the centerpiece of the campaign. A logo is routinely the most difficult component to design because it is so important, and usually the client wants to be closely involved. An effective logo is a kind of calculus, the sum of disparate parts that adds up to a memorable image or icon. In this case, the logo is something of a risk because it is neither the name nor initials of the organization but a visual pun on the words We and Me.

Does it succeed in being a distinctive mnemonic? We'll be in a better position to judge when we know if Mr. Gore's organization has picked up steam and created a buzz.

WHY WE? The alliance needed a simple graphic idea "because it had to cross every boundary and cross every political view," said Mr. Collins, who found the conceptual solution in a passage from Mr. Gore's recent book, "Assault on Reason": "Our first expression as a nation — 'We the People' — made it clear where the ultimate source of authority lay."

In that phrase of the Constitution, Mr. Collins found his graphic element. "*We* not only have to work together to solve the climate crisis, but *we* have to call, loudly, for our political and business leaders to get involved, too," Mr. Collins said.

WHY ME? When the logo is turned upside down, you see the ME in WE. Mr. Collins felt this was both a clever and profound expression of the campaign's ambition. "What's good is that the idea of 'me' — and personal initiative — still lives inside the idea of 'we,'" he says. It is also a word game that forces the "reader" to decipher, and, once that is accomplished, makes the logo even more memorable.

TYPOGRAPHY Mr. Collins said he was interested in achieving the clarity of 1960's Swiss/Modernist poster design. But those characteristic typefaces, like Helvetica, were very cold. A typographer, Chester Jenkins, was asked to create a new typeface for the alliance's campaign. Mr. Collins said he wanted a typeface that was "friendlier" than that of the Swiss posters. The new typeface, with small, more rounded gestures, is little bit quirky, but has a curiously warm appearance, too. Moreover, the letter 'w' clearly looks like an upside down 'm'.

SHAPE The circle frames the words, but it also symbolizes that the climate crisis affects everyone on the planet.

BRIGHT GREEN What other color says "green" better than, well, green? The vivid, practically lime-green color for the logo suggests an inviting and optimistic attitude that fits well with the alliance's Web site, which is called wecansolveit.org.
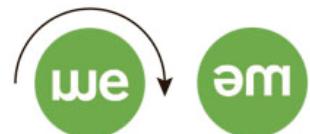
Sources: The Martin Agency (Mike Hughes, Sean Riley, Ty Harper, Raymond McKinney, Matt Williams); Collins: (Brian Collins, John Moon, Mickey Pangilinan)

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