

A QUEST FOR THE PERFECT LOGO:  
A TALE OF SQUIRRELS AND NUTS

HONORS THESIS

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by

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A QUEST FOR THE PERFECT LOGO:  
A TALE OF SQUIRRELS AND NUTS

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## **DESIGNING AS A PROBLEM SOLVER**

*The creative process guided through the scientific method*

A graphic designer's role is to utilize visual elements in order to exemplify, portray, and shape an idea or experience. Designers encompass the ability to work within a set of rules and limitations, without breaking them. Limitations of visual communication vary from dimensions of a large billboard to the legal sizes of a postage stamp. Through experimentation with line, color, space, typography, images, and words, a final design is obtained. Visual elements are secondary and a technical skill in a creative process. Enduring designs are constructed through a concise and well-developed creative strategy. However, to carry out such strategy, discovering the actual problem is the first step. During my quest of producing an everlasting logo for Sched, I applied the scientific method to streamline, breakdown, and guide my creative process towards a successful solution.

## **OBSERVATION**

### *Finding the problem*

A clear and concise problem narrows down visual production because it essentially provides a purpose for the designer. Strategic statements vary depending on the client, purpose, and problem needing to be solved. For instance, if the strategic statement is to, “force connect beer and thrift store culture”, a designer begins to explore imagery dealing with “beer” and “thrift” to find a similar relation between each category.

The client will already have a formulated a “problem” for the designer, but in most cases, this is not the overall problem that needs to be solved. Usually it’s a creative task the company cannot do without a designer. The need for a creative solution arises for different reasons, such as a growing clientele, additional components and services of the company, complaints of visual confusion, etc. While working with the owner of Sched, Taylor McKnight, I was given the project of building a logo establishing them as a friendly and trustworthy client.

The project came with an objective and several adjectives of how the company should be presented.

## Logo Discussion

Posted by Taylor McKnight on Sep 19



Some words I'd like to keep in mind for the logo:  
simple, elegant, polished, friendly

I'm primarily interested in the logo being simple, iconic & easy to recognize as universally ours. I've attached some logos I really like that accomplish that.

Some inspiration that led me to creating the one I sent you previously:

<http://www.mohawkconnects.com/feltandwire/2012/04/17/michael-bierut-on-rebr...>

[http://www.underconsideration.com/brandnew/archives/mowhawk\\_connects\\_the\\_do...](http://www.underconsideration.com/brandnew/archives/mowhawk_connects_the_do...)

<http://websummit.net/>

<http://www.neogrey.com/portfolio/multicolore-vector-font/>



To specify my creative direction, I began to observe Sched, and tried to understand who they are and what they do, and compare them to their competitors.

### *Who, What, Where, When and Why?*

After some digging and constantly bombarding Taylor with questions about Sched, I realized that the company is entirely a digital service. Sched provides its clients with self-serve platforms for their scheduling needs. To further elaborate, their services cater to large events such as SXSW, Austin Film Festival, and many others needing easy scheduling through digital mediums such as apps and websites. Sched's scheduling tools are completely editable by the company and their employees, while providing a 251% viral lift with social media additions, and analytics on the most successful and influential portions of the event.

Sched is an extremely innovative company that provides new age products and solutions. The company's office is completely digital, with their employees living all around the world from California to Croatia. They work from home with online services that delegate files, forums, and project communications. Sched's employees are fairly young, ranging from the ages of 25-32, and had previously worked with influential and revolutionary websites such as [hypem.com](http://hypem.com), [soundcloud.com](http://soundcloud.com), and [grooveshark.com](http://grooveshark.com). Posting fairly often on social media, most of the employees share their thoughts, words, and pictures through the Internet. The company as a collective is innovative, young, and friendly. Sched's current logo is a simple and safe logo. A logo's purpose is to illustrate the message of a brand. As of now, their current one does not do so.



Although Sched is a company that provides newly surfaced products, it isn't the only one. Comparing Sched's brand to its competitors shows whether or not there is a recognizable visual assertion of their services. It also assists in understanding where the company succeeds and fails in their message. Other companies I observed were Eventbrite, Doubledutch, Guidebook, and EventMobi. Their logos echoed Sched's and lacked to provide any visual synopsis of their brand, opening up the possibility of Sched being the first with a cohesive trademark. I became overly eager to start designing. Knowing that their logo could be different from the others caused me to skip the rest of the scientific method, and I began to produce logos.



eventmobi  
doubledutch

*Eventbrite*<sup>TM</sup>

guidebook

## **A PREMATURE EXPERIMENTATION**

As many designers have experienced, I became overly ambitious and began production before strategizing. Developing a simple and elegant logo is extremely hard to do, even though it looks dead easy. While experimenting, my goal was to make an innovative logo, but it was not guided by a strategy. Innovation seemed to be the main attribution of their services and personality. I cannot say that it was a mistake to prematurely experiment, because it made me realize that symbolizing innovation was not the solution. Then again, if I had continued observing Sched, could I have achieved my strategic statement without any production? I became obsessed with the playful letterform of an “S” and dissecting it’s form to make something “pretty”. After a month of trial and errors, every logo created during the premature experimentation phase failed to communicate anything for the company. I finally quit when I constructed the one I felt strongly about and presented it to my client. It completely backfired.



**Taylor McKnight**

Hey Z,

Shared this with the team and I feel that it elicits two negative connotations that make going in this direction a bad idea:

a) swastika-like

b) an hourglass = waiting for something to load = slow

BTW, we're open to an icon of some sort, it doesn't have to be an "S" (like some of the logos at the top of this page). Despite the company name, now and in the future we're more than "just" a scheduler, we're growing into an event solution (your event website, event mobile app, attendance tracking, email marketing to your attendees, etc).

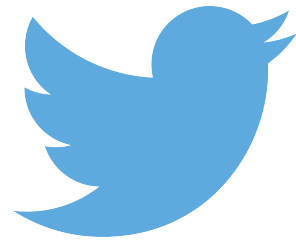
Posted on Sep 30

After being provided with the accurate analysis and feedback, I picked up where I left off and continued my observation of Sched.

### *Back to Observation*

I was stumped. How do I produce a logo that sets itself apart among its competitors? Looking back at see faults in my previous findings, I found that I only looked at companies that provided services similar to Sched's. None of their

competitors had a memorable trademark and I needed to look at ones that were. Three brands instantly came to mind, Apple, Twitter, and Instagram. Observing another group of successful and digitally relative brands provided me with information to finally put together the problem. Within an hour I found a common factor among all of them, and understood why my previous experimentation wasn't working. I was fixated on creating something "new", instead of pulling inspiration from what exists beyond the "new" and "digital".



## **PROBLEM**

### *The Purpose*

Sched's problem was their innovative, new and digitally based purposes. Their product and services lack any visual reference that can potentially be appealing as a logo. For instance, all that could come to mind were images of screens, screens, and more screens.

Twitter, Instagram, and Apple utilize recognizable imagery to convey their overall message in an approachable manner for their audience. Their logos recall an image that symbolizes their brand beyond digital representation.

## **HYPOTHESIS**

### *The Strategy*

Sched is tech-savvy by the services they provide, but what draws them and their services back to their audience? Applying relatable visual elements to Sched's new logo will achieve the message of humanizing their services.

## **EXPERIMENTATION**

### *The Development*

During the experimentation phase, the designer sifts through visual elements in correlation to the problem. For Sched, it's to humanize their services, but what exactly does that mean? How does the designer take a simple strategic statement and create the perfect logo from it?

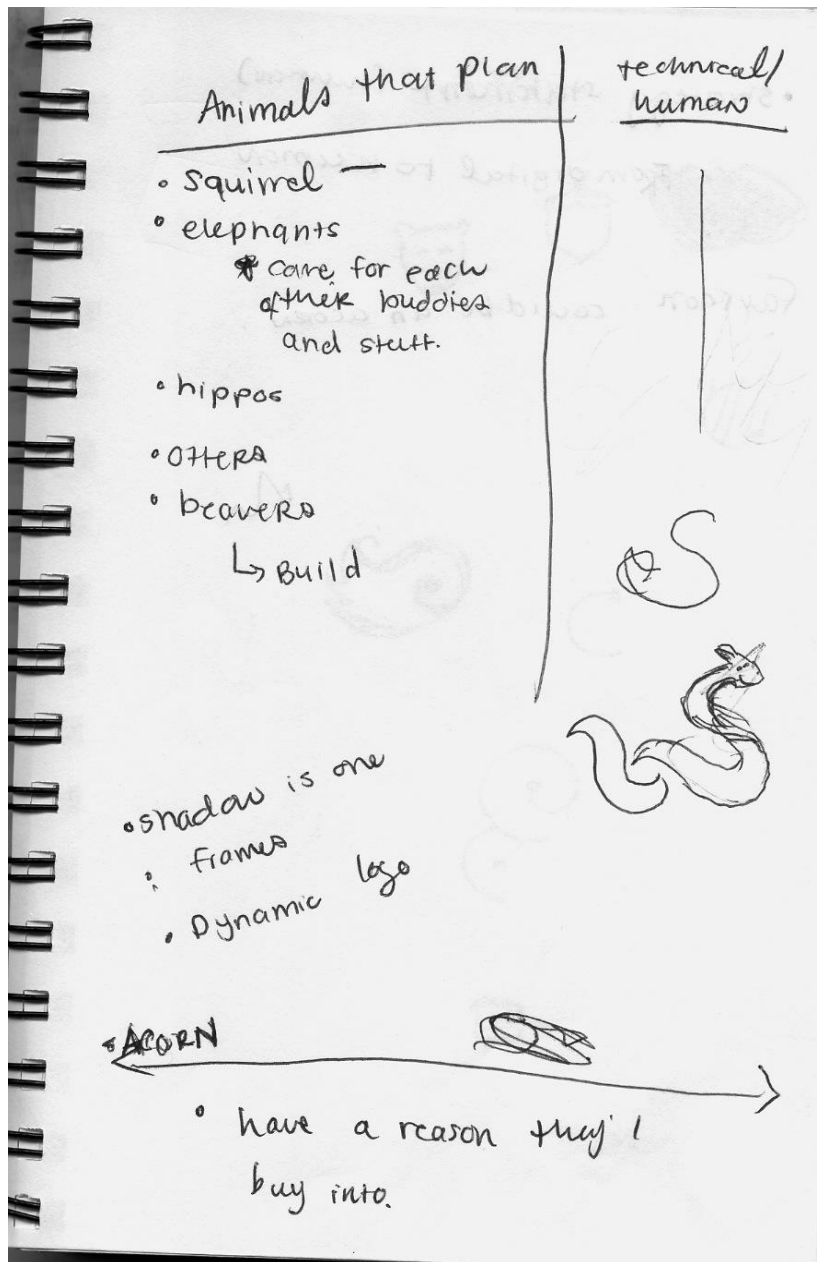
### *The Wordlist*

The designer organizes, elaborates, and expands on information from the observation phase, in correlation to the designer's strategy. For instance, pulling different nouns, adjectives, and verbs about Sched into a wordlist helps organize visual elements that can be associated with the company. Main ideas are listed at the top, broken down into smaller ideas associated with them. The following are examples of my wordlists used for my experimentation.

- cheap
- saves time
- efficient
- quick
  - fast
- super awesome customer support
- friendly
- personal
- rapid
  - intuitive
  - fully hosted
  - reliable
  - dependent
  - autonomy
  - fingers touch
  - organizer
  - classify
  - straighten
- solutions
- tailor
- compose
- build
- information assimilation
- mold
- malleable
- linked
- connection
- brings together
- networking

### Connections

- friends
- new ppl
- your family
- ~~old~~ old
- relations
- group
- community
- get into
- plug into
- a fix
- marry



The wordlist helped me break down Sched into words, nouns, and adjectives that followed my strategy. Through these specific wordlists, I thought of friendly animals that are known for scheduling and planning.



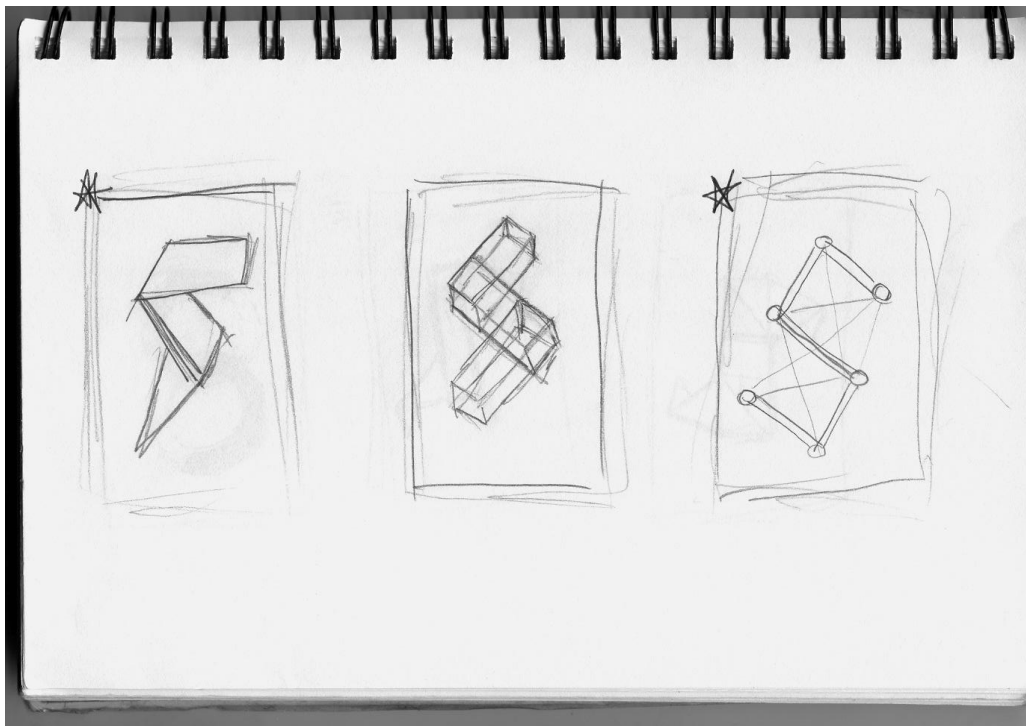
## *The Mind Map*

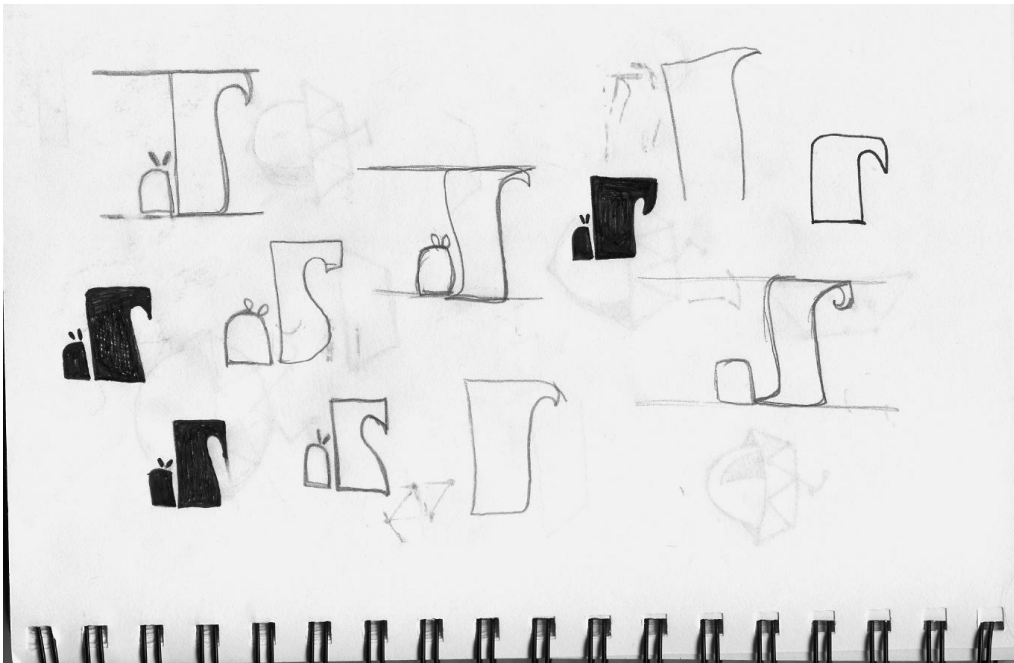
Beyond the organization of words, expanding on them can lead to finding unique imagery, feelings, and directions from the main purpose. Developing a mind map, kind of like a web, provides such an expansion. The purpose of a mind map is to break down linear thinking and create a variety of words, no matter how much they veer from the purpose. Each category is written down as the main idea of the web and then is broken down into smaller categories, and so on and so forth. The designer can link any word to another, as long as they relate in anyway. For example, if the main subject is “apple” it can go into any other subcategory the designer wants, such as, “fruit”, “sweet”, and “red”. After establishing the subcategories the designer can write down any word dealing with each category. Expanding on each category from the wordlist specifies the color, line, matter and feelings to be associated with the logo. Provided is an example of the one of many mind-maps I used during my experimentation.



## *The Thumbnails*

Having expanded the strategy through wordlists and mind maps, the designer concludes their experimentation through thumbnails. Thumbnails are small hand-drawn explorations of trademarks derived from the wordlists, and mind maps. A thumbnail's main purpose is to illustrate the hypothesis and is kept small to avoid excess visual elaboration.





Here I began to play with different variations of the squirrel, an animal known to plant acorns for later uses. I used simplified forms to correlate with Sched's requirement for their logo. After a development of however many thumbs the designer wishes to explore, the first phase of experimentation is over.

## ANALYSIS

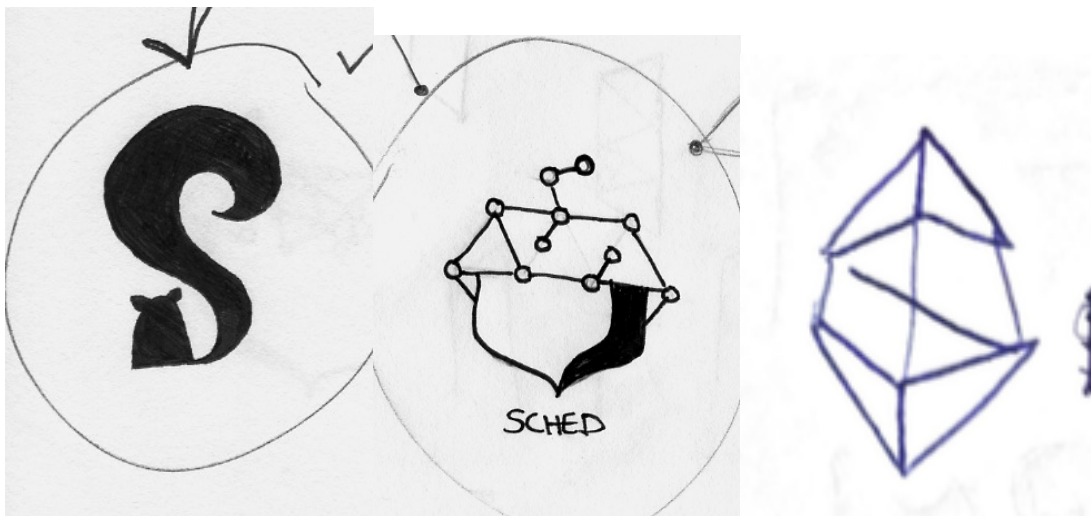
Analyzing the results or in this case, the thumbnails, is significant in development towards a final logo. In this particular experiment, the client acts like an independent variable in the trademark process, and can change the direction entirely. After completion of the hand-drawn logos, Sched will either approve or disapprove the strategy, and select a visual direction they want to go in. If disapproved the designer, (myself), goes back to the drawing board and repeats the process.



**Taylor McKnight**

I love seeing your progress here. Just wanted to mention these were the 3 that caught my eye

Posted on Oct 14

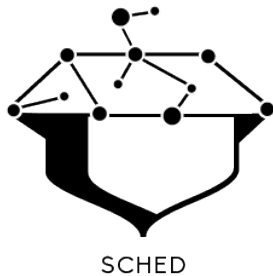


Sched's feedback (analysis) was positive, and gave me these three thumbnails for the next phase of experimentation, the simplified squirrel, connected acorn, and a basic geometric S from the premature experimentation.



## EXPERIMENTATION 2

Looking at the three visuals selected, I decided not to continue experimentation with the geometric S thumbnail because it did not follow the overall strategy. I continued my experimentation and started to refine the squirrel and acorn through computer illustration and graphics software.



## ANALYSIS 2

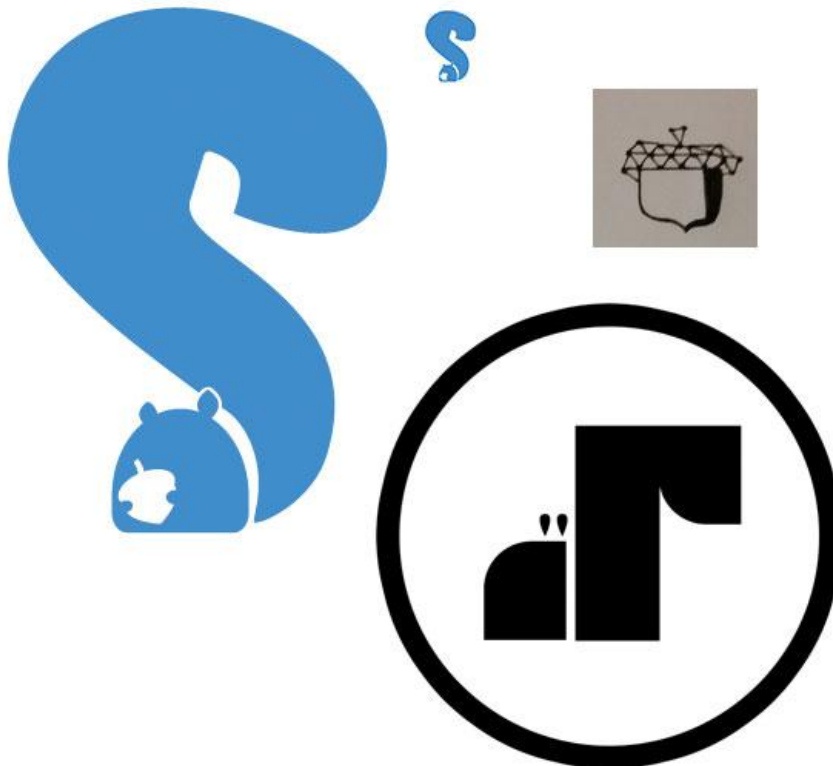


### Taylor McKnight

I had a good discussion with Ante and here are some thoughts:

- \* The squirrel holding the tilted acorn is pretty cool and getting better.
- \* We have to make sure it looks great when shrunk to fit into the black menu bar though
- \* It might be interesting to use an acorn for icon usage (in menu bar, on iphone app home screens, fav-icons, etc) and the larger sched squirrel holding acorn in places with more room (in the control panel, in sched emails, etc).
- \* the acorn with the simpler top is better and a bit more recognizable
- \* the retro squirrel is pretty interesting. I love that it's so simple. I think the design could be played with a bit more (ears look mousey to me)
- \* It reminds me of something Paul Rand or Saul Bass would make:

**SCHED**





The feedback from Sched was more concise, and gave me specific directions in which way the company wanted to go. Essentially, the main idea of the logo has been found and needs continued experimentation and analysis. Only when the client has selected a squirrel that fits them, will the development process of the logo end.

## CONCLUSION

Although the logo is still evolving visually, the final concept of the logo has been reached: A simplified squirrel that is known to plan, be quick, friendly, and fast. The selected imagery fits the task given by Sched, and desired portrayal of themselves. Having a guide for a designer's creative process assists in constructing a successful logo, not because it breaks it down incrementally, but solves an overall problem. While searching for the perfect logo, my results concluded that the perfect logo can not be found without a concise strategy and continued experimentation. I found that it took me less time to develop a successful logo when I had researched the problem and worked with the client to write a clearly defined problem.



To view the evolution of Sched's logo, please visit:

[www.zoha.us/sched](http://www.zoha.us/sched)

