Succeeding With Identity Document Design

The opportunity to redesign your country's passport or national ID is often as daunting as it is exciting. Which new technologies will help you fight counterfeiting and protect people's identities? Which visual elements will showcase your national heritage, aspirations and culture? Which security features will help you streamline the authentication process?

In this white paper, we'll outline three essential factors to consider as you start working on your new document. **Reflecting on these issues in advance will help streamline the design process and deliver a result that is vibrant, meaningful and secure.**

Three Essential Factors for Success With Document Design

International standards already specify many elements of an identity document's design, from its size and format to specific security features it has to include. However, your identity document design partners will still need to establish a close, collaborative working environment to understand your specific goals — and craft a document that delivers on them. In particular, they will need to understand your perspective on the following three elements.

1. HOW THE DESIGN REPRESENTS YOUR CULTURE

Identity documents should reflect what makes your country unique, from its culture and its history to its landscape and geography.

CULTURE

A good identity document reflects your country's culture in a way that citizens can understand and identify with. It presents your goals and ambitions in a way that pushes beyond stereotype.

Estonia, for example, wanted its passport to reflect the country's love of nature — and its highly innovative society. HID collaborated with the **Estonian Police and Border Guard Board (PPA) to tell a story about Estonia's untouched natural beauty and how it coexists with one of the world's most digitally advanced cultures.** A window cut through the polycarbonate substrate outlines a modern map of Estonia while a dragonfly sits underneath. On later pages, UV print reveals the moon as it cycles through the Northern hemisphere.

To reflect your culture in your new document, think about how your country positions itself economically, politically and socially. *What are your aspirations and ambitions? What ideas unify your country? Is there a particular artistic style that's prevalent or popular or symbols or patterns that resonate?*

HISTORY

In a world where identity is increasingly digital, documents are still an effective tool for encouraging civic engagement. Passports, in particular, enable you to curate a story about your country's past and how it reflects on the present.

Malta's passport, for instance, includes imagery of renowned landmarks, including the Ċittadella in Gozo — an area that has been settled at least since the Bronze Age — and the Manoel Theatre. Security features incorporate the Maltese cross, the George cross and the national coat of arms.

To reflect your history in your new document, identify important moments that are still relevant to today's residents. *How has your country evolved? What are its main sites of historical interest? What accomplishments are people proud of?*

Identity documents transcend their function; they are objects of beauty and relevance. Incorporating images of the natural terrain into your design is a great way of enhancing its visual appeal and reminding people about the places they admire.

Tanzania's 2018 ePassport incorporated technological advances like an embedded data chip and streamlined enrollment processes. It is also marked by stunning imagery of landmarks like Mount Kilimanjaro and Zanzibar's House of Wonders. Tanzanian wildlife like giraffes and elephants — and other scenes from the Savannah — are also represented.

To reflect your landscape in the design of your new document, consider your country's geography. *Are there well-loved rivers, forests, mountains or other natural features? Are there animals or plants that are of particular relevance to residents?*

2. HOW THE DESIGN SECURES THE DOCUMENT

Security and design are intimately intertwined. International organizations like the International Civil Aviation Organization's ICAO 9303 outline a number of different features that identity documents should contain, from machine readability to cryptographic protocols. For the best results, you'll need to incorporate these features into your design at the outset. Otherwise, their inclusion will undermine the document's aesthetics — and potentially even undercut their own effectiveness.

Why? Because good security comes not by including any one technique but through the careful integration of mulitple different features. That way, documents will be difficult to manipulate or dissassemble, and law enforcement officials will be able to quickly and efficiently distinguish between authentic documents and ones that have been forged.

To maximize the security of your new document, understand which elements you need and how you'll produce and incorporate them into the overall design. Security features that are complex to manufacture or expensive to authenticate will not offer any protection. Those that add visual distraction will make inspection more difficult.
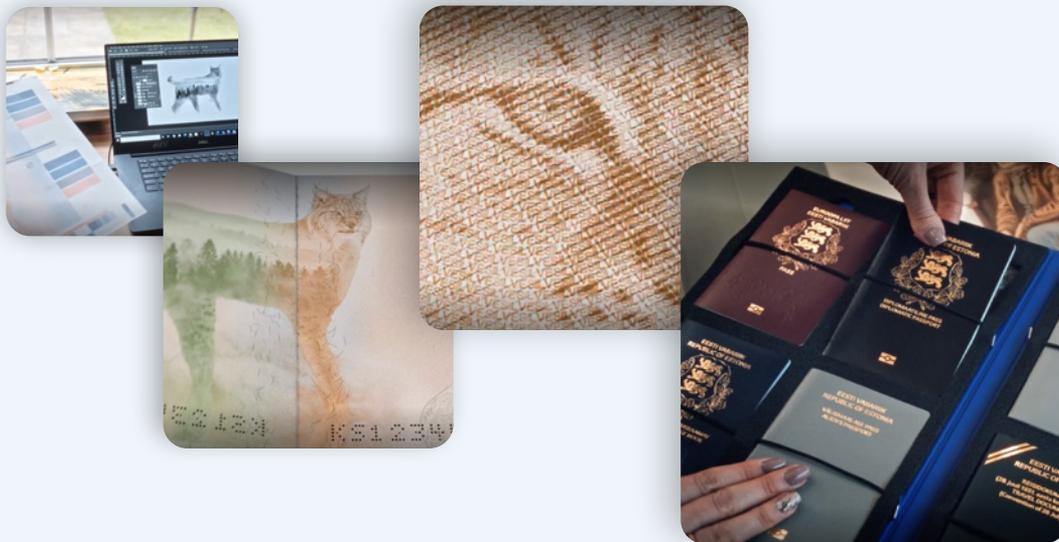
3. HOW THE DESIGN ENHANCES USABILITY

Identity documents are made to verify that people are who they say they are. Their usability relates to how well they accommodate the needs and contexts in which they will be used. To make usable documents, designers will consider:

- Typography — Identity documents contain a lot of information that is often presented quite densely. Good typography makes this information easier to read and understand. It also helps reinforce the document's visual design, maintain thematic consistency and satisfy machine readability requirements.

- Security features — Secure documents are protected by a broad range of different features. Yet these features must not conflict with or undermine each other. A hologram might protect people's portraits, but it cannot interfere with the readability of that portrait. A watermark might signal that a document is authentic, but if it is overlaid by heavy print, the effect will be masked.

- User base — Identity documents are used both by ordinary citizens and by trained specialists like border guards and law enforcement officials. Design and security features must accommodate both groups. The average person has little experience of judging real from fake, but they can still recognize a watermark through experience in other domains. At the same time, incorporating additional complexity into the feature enables people with more training to look deeper at the details that help them verify its authenticity.

Identifying What's Important

Designing a meaningful identity document requires careful collaboration between countries and their design partners. Governments should come with a clear perspective about what's important to their country. Designers will then work with them to hone the narrative and bring it to life in a finished design that all can be proud of.

Learn more about creating compelling identity documents:

- Read our infographic about the four steps of designing meaningful identity documents