

Branding Essentials & Checklist

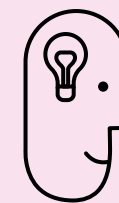
Welcome

Can you have a business without a brand? Well, yes. You can. The pizza joint down the road is likely a business, not a brand. Your dry cleaners – same story. The local veterinarian? Not exactly challenging Apple on the slick advertising front. All of these examples show that you can operate a successful business without having a real “brand.”

But, if your business isn’t driven by necessity or pure convenience, chances are you do need a brand. That’s because you have to give people a reason to choose your business over the competition (or buy nothing at all) and without a strong brand, that’s an exceptionally hard sell. Why?

A brand gives a business its unique identity – its look and feel, voice and personality. Think about it – without its brand, Nike is just another shoemaker and Bergdorf Goodman is just another department store.

A strong brand comes from a place of truth about what a business authentically represents, and about what its products mean to its customers. It’s not magic, it’s insight. In the following pages, we’ll explain the key elements you’ll need to create a sharp, authentic brand that will stand out from your competitors and resonate with your customers.

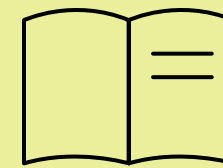


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Your beliefs

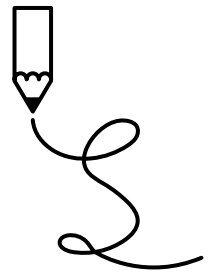
Like (most) humans, great brands have engaging personalities, opinions, and values by which they live. The brand manifesto is a declaration of all this, distilled into a succinct, inspiring message that can be grasped at a glance. It should identify your business mission – for example, a promised level of service for customers; and your vision – a motivational statement about how you'd like to impact the future.

Your brand manifesto articulates what matters to your brand. It is your driving force and becomes a valuable resource for employees as it serves to unite everyone around a set of values. This is especially useful when onboarding new team members. And it will help you grow. When people connect with your philosophy, they will become ambassadors for your brand.



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Creating a manifesto



To create a manifesto, you'll need to describe your brand's philosophy (don't worry, no degree needed!). This is simply a statement of your beliefs and values and how these play out in what you do as a business.

One way to approach this is to make a vision board filled with words, pictures, and drawings that resonate with your business. Ask yourself questions like: Why did I want to start a business? What motivates me? What does success look like for me, my customers and my employees?

By doing this it might help you see patterns or keywords that stand out. Once you're ready (you can always add to this later) start drafting a written manifesto. What's most important here is that it's simple to read and that you actually connect with these words - avoid generic buzzwords. Your manifesto can be just one line or a series of short, active statements that sum up your beliefs and values.

Some great examples:

Google

With lines like "You can be serious without a suit," Google's 10-point manifesto is playful, but it's also sincere. Most importantly, it's perfectly in line with the Google brand.

Lululemon

From "listen, listen, listen" to "this is not your practice life," this manifesto goes beyond the product to portray the mindset and lifestyle that Lululemon wants to promote.

The North Face

The North Face created a film to bring its brand manifesto to life. Its emotive pledge, "Never Stop Exploring," extends all the way from its site content to its blog.

Your people

Business is made up of people, and it's people that bring your brand to life every day. So when you define your brand's personality, also think about how that plays out in behaviour. Your brand defines what you do and what you don't do.

A brand can't just talk the talk, it has to walk the walk. So make sure your brand behaviour matches your brand voice. People don't shape their opinions about a brand on marketing materials alone; they'll be watching how you behave on social media, in the press, and even in your stores, where the task of preserving your image falls to your employees.

By creating an environment where people enjoy their work and understand the wider mission, your employees (whether there are two or two hundred) will become your brand's most valuable cheerleaders.

“A brand can't just talk the talk, it has to walk the walk. So make sure your brand behavior matches your brand voice.”

Brand culture must-haves:



Onboarding

Give new staff the best start possible and make them feel welcome in an instant. This includes getting them introduced to people within the company and making sure they have business cards, notebooks and all of the brand logos, fonts and guides from the get go.



Brand manifesto

Keep your vision alive by printing out your manifesto for all to see and share. Make it big and bold so visitors to the office can instantly get on board with who you are.



Social media guidelines

You might also consider creating an employee advocacy playbook that outlines your social media policy. In general, you'll want to include some gentle reminders about conduct to ensure that your staff is always thoughtful and respectful when speaking on behalf of your brand.



Communication

Informed employees will feel more involved in what you're aiming for as a business. So whether it's a regular newsletter, notes from the CEO, company-wide meetings, daily sales updates, feedback sessions (or in fact all of these!), create a culture of transparency.



Training & Development

As your business grows, help your people develop and grow alongside it – they will thank you for it. Make sure new starters receive training that enables them to deliver what you're expecting them to. Don't forget existing staff, opportunities like ongoing training will help you retain the best people.

Your product

When it comes to choosing a product or service, customers have more options at their disposal than ever before. For your brand to stand out, you need to understand what your business offers that's different to all those others.

To do this effectively, you will need to write a value proposition. A value proposition is a promise of value to be delivered and is one of the biggest factors in lifting sales.

A value proposition explains how your product solves problems and improves situations. It lists the benefits to the customer and sets out why people should buy from you over the competition.

“In a single sentence, your value proposition aligns key people in the business with a single purpose and explains why customers should buy your products.”

Answer these six questions:

- 1 Who is your customer?**
To help you get really detailed on who you're attempting to reach, use our Buyer Persona Template.
- 2 What problem do you solve?**
From your customer's perspective, what challenge are you solving for them? Visualize your perceived value.
- 3 What are your distinctive benefits?**
List three to five benefits your customer gets from choosing your product/service that customers don't get from going somewhere else.
- 4 What's your brand promise?**
This is like a pledge. What will you always do for your customers? It might be a money-back happiness guarantee on every order.
- 5 How does it fit together?**
Create a single paragraph from your answers so far. It's ok if things merge and overlap – the aim is to end up with a unique message.
- 6 Can you make it shorter?**
Now, refine. Take your time, review again and again until you've distilled your value proposition to one clear line that captures everything you want to say.

Your story

As humans, one of the ways we build relationships is through the stories we tell, why else do we catch up with our friends, right?! In business, this is not so different. You want to create moments between your business and your customers. Those willing to share the experiences of their founders, customers and staff can reap the many benefits that storytelling offers. It shifts the focus a little from what you do and talks about why you do it.

Your brand story is as individual as you are, and it needs to tell your audience who you are and why you're doing what you do. It is where your manifesto comes to life, giving your audience context for your business and a chance to connect with what is important to you. After all, people buy from people.

“Your brand story is as individual as you are and it needs to tell your audience who you are and why you're doing what you do.”

Some great examples:

SUGRU

Moldable glue brand SUGRU uses a chronological photo series to tell the story of how its founder Jane Ní Dhulchaointigh invented the unique material. It really speaks to the maker community, their biggest audience.

Virgin

Richard Branson, the lifelong adventurer, adds huge value to the Virgin Group as a "challenger brand" that is not yet a category leader. Aside from engaging people with genuinely interesting content, its compelling storytelling helps earn loyalty and trust.

West America

Started by two best friends who travelled hundreds of miles together on motorcycles, West America sells gear aimed at their fellow adventurers. Rather than straight up selling their products, they use their website to share stories and photos from their trips.

Your personality

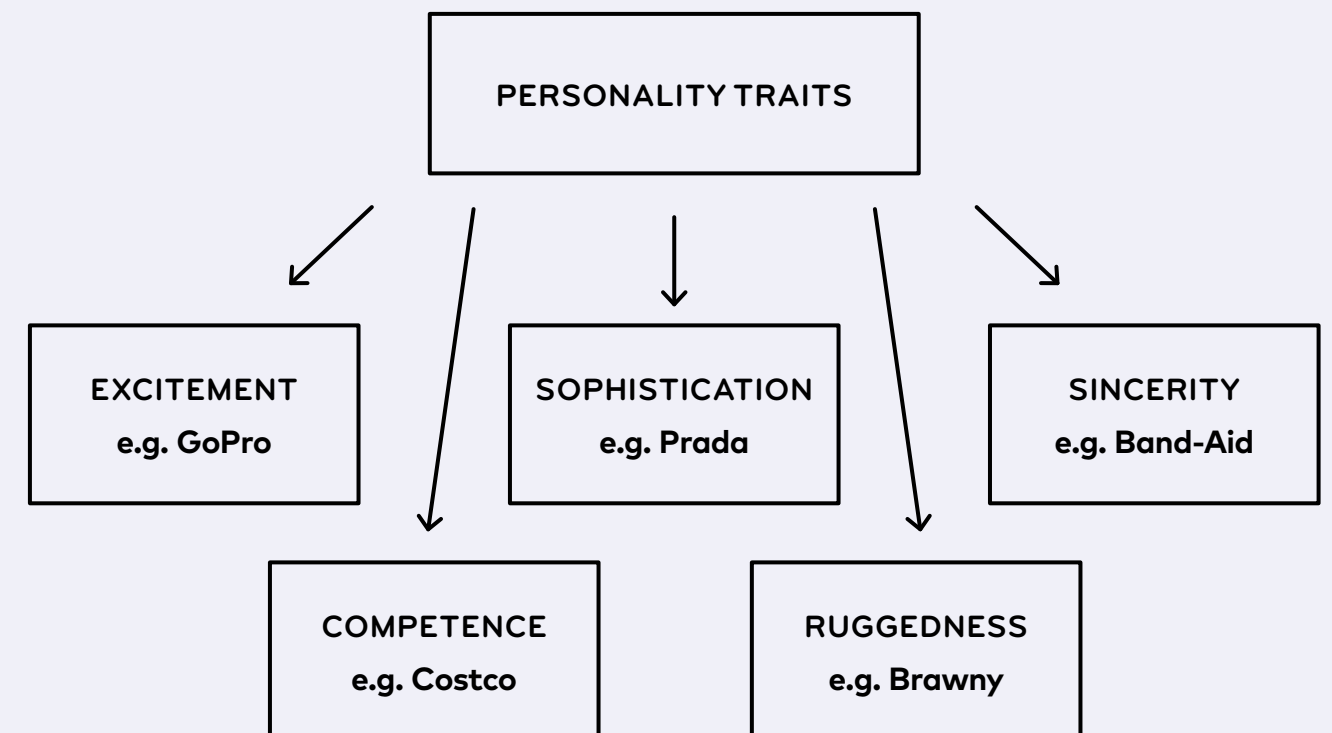
Like a person, your brand is essentially your business's "personality" – how you are perceived by the world. Buying decisions are both rational and emotional, and a strong brand taps into its customers' emotions and aspirations.

According to Stanford professor and social psychologist Jennifer Aaker, there are five major types of brand personality. Think of these in connection to your own brand, remember to remain authentic to your own values and pick the **one** personality trait that describes it best.

Use your dominant personality trait to map out other related characteristics – for example, a sophisticated brand might be elegant, elitist and restrained – and use these attributes to guide the development of your brand style.

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What is your personality?



Your voice

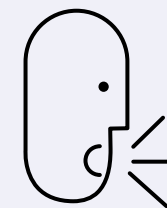
Your brand personality is expressed through voice. The language you use, from your voicemail message to your product tags, speaks volumes about who you are.

So ask yourself if your brand was a person, how would you talk and what would you say?

Your tone will change based on who you're talking to: different customers, for instance, on different platforms. There's nothing wrong with this – in fact, it's a good thing.

Imagine a friend at a Friday night party, then picture that same friend on a Monday morning at work. Like anyone, their tone is likely to vary from one environment to the next. That doesn't mean your friend has adopted an entirely new personality. It just means they're adapting to their circumstances and are, well, real.

That said, the core characteristics of your voice really shouldn't change. If your brand is serious and authoritative, employing sarcasm and humour can feel inappropriate and confusing for people. A big part of having a clear brand voice is familiarity – it makes you recognizable as a brand, and people know what to expect. Which they like, a lot!



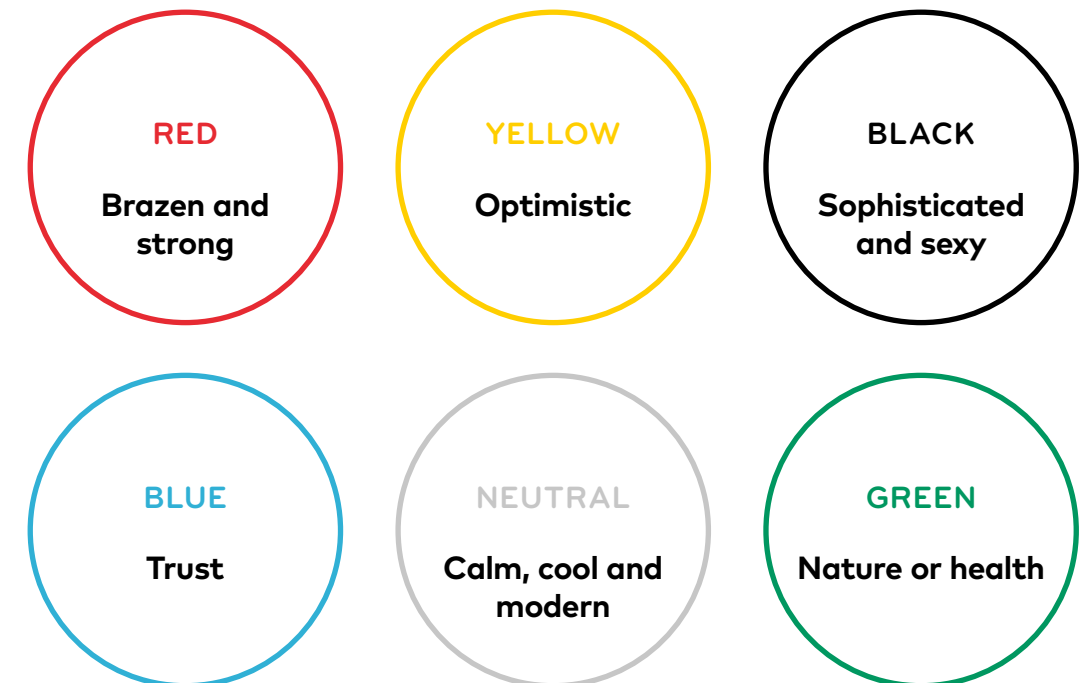
“So ask yourself if your brand was a person, how would you talk and what would you say?”

Your look

The next step is define what your brand looks like. Your visual identity is a visualization of your brand's characteristics and includes your logo, color palette, typography, and more. Even though logo strategies are evolving in line with the rise in digital channels and formats available, color matters, especially to consumers choosing a product from a store shelf, or a brand to engage with online.

Research shows that when purchasing a product more than 92 percent of people place the most importance on visual perceptions, and 84 percent are influenced by color. Color can affect your mood, improve comprehension, and incite an immediate response.

Colorful characteristics



Some great examples:



Your channels

Now that you have your brand style covered, you can bring this to life in all sorts of fun ways and using all kinds of communication channels. For the best results, be consistent in how you present yourself. To get you thinking about which ones fit you, here are some online and offline channels.



Online:

Website

Your website is your store window. Make sure yours exudes your brand identity, from color and typography to brand voice, and keep it up to date. If you're using your website to sell your products, be sure to take great photographs – they'll need to look their best.

Social media

This can be overwhelming. Choose the one or two channels your audience uses most, and craft a consistent presence there. Start slow and build up to what's realistic for you. Remember, once you start using these channels, the only way to grow an audience is to be present and engaged with your followers.

Brand newsletters

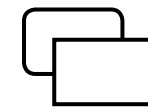
If you intend to share company news, don't get lost amongst the spam. Temper the marketing tone of your messages by integrating stories about your staff and customers. Outdoor brand Patagonia sends newsletters with "Field Reports" written by athletes and travellers.

Transactional emails

These are the ones that directly promote products, promotions and include emails sent to confirm an order or sign up for an account. Keep these succinct, but write with flair, too.

Videos

Videos are a great way to bring your brand to life. They are the perfect vehicle to introduce your products and services too. Be sure to keep them short and snappy making them perfect for social media sharing.



Offline:

Business cards:

Your business cards are pocket-sized promotional opportunities. Make sure they include relevant things like your social media handles and links to your website, wherever you want people to visit or contact you.

Loyalty cards

As well as encourage return visits to your store for the price of a free coffee (on the 10th visit), loyalty cards often get carried around by your customers – make sure they reflect your brand.

Postcards

Postcards are a fun way raise brand awareness. Whether you choose to mail them, add them to your packaging or distribute them at local businesses, get creative to make sure they get picked up and never put down.

Stationery

Sure, we send fewer letters these days, but that's all the more reason to make the ones we do, special. So whether it's a job offer letter or a note to an investor, make sure it looks and feels like your business with a branded letterhead.

Packaging

In the age of online shopping, the "unboxing" moment is a powerful and emotional experience for customers all around the world. Insert some delight into your next package with branded postcards, stickers and MiniCards.

Your toolkit

The journey to becoming a fully-fledged brand can now begin. On your path you will encounter cynics, challenges and hurdles. But you will also be delighted with cheerleaders, opportunities and triumphs. Stick with it. We've got your back.

**Brand Checklist**

Use the Brand Checklist that's included in this kit. Print it out. Keep it beside you. It maps out the milestones you need to hit and will keep you on the track that's right for your brand.

**Buyer Persona Template**

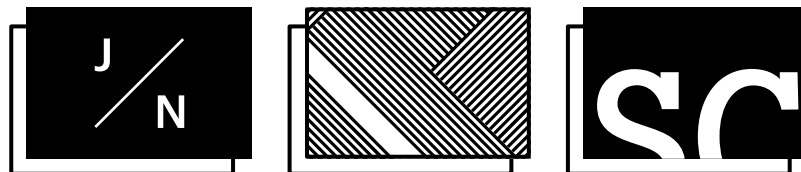
Complete the template to help you focus on exactly who your customers are and remind you about why you are doing what you do.

**Exclusive Business Card Designs**

To make sure your brand is loud and clear, here are some exclusive Business Cards that will make sure you make a great impression every time.

Start making your Business Cards here

Click on the designs to create your cards.



Extra goodies

While this book has introduced you to the essentials of creating a brand, there's lots more out there on the subjects covered. Here are some handy extras.

Brand Values

- [How to write a great Brand Manifesto](#)
- [Why brand authenticity matters](#)
- [10 businesses with great company cultures](#)

Brand Messages

- [How to write a great brand proposition](#)
- [What it means to tell your story](#)

Brand Style

- [How to write copy that people want to read](#)
- [The psychology of logo design](#)

The Branding Essentials & Checklist
has been produced in partnership between
MOO and Hubspot because we both love
helping businesses grow and develop.

HubSpot

is an inbound marketing and sales software
platform that helps companies attract visitors,
convert leads and close customers.

MOO

is an online print and design company that makes
it easy for everybody to create seriously beautiful
stationery, like Business Cards, Notecards,
Stickers and Flyers.