

Continuous

Branding

**For Service-Based Organisations
Ambitious to Grow**

Craig Thatcher

Who will find this book useful?

If you own, manage or market a service-based organisation and have big ambitions for the future then this book introduces you to a strategic tool that could help you build your brand more consistently and sustainably. With determination, it could also help you to lead your market too.

Introducing the five principles of Continuous Branding to help you achieve a greater performance:

- 1. Think like a Brand Owner**
- 2. Lead from a Powerful Market Position**
- 3. Have a Point of View**
- 4. Personalise your Brand Experience**
- 5. Invest Continuously to Grow Consistently**

You'll also learn how Greg Mace, Managing Director of Rapport Guest Services uses Continuous Branding to grow by more than 20% per annum, and has created a market leading, award winning business within three short years in the highly competitive world of corporate front of house services.

This Book is Dedicated to You...

If you're building your service-based organisation through your people and seek a more consistent and sustainable way to growth. It's also dedicated to you if you aren't convinced growth can be achieved by doing things the same way they've always been done. If you're open to new ways of thinking, this book is for you.

For www.DrugFAM.co.uk, a charity that provides help and support services for the families, friends and carers of people addicted to drink and drugs.

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Continuous Branding

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CHAPTER 1
**Why branding
is Vital**

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Printed in the United Kingdom and published simultaneously in electronic format.

First edition, 2015

ISBN: 978-0-9932168-1-7

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

The most successful owners and managers of service-based organisations realise that branding adds tangible value on a daily basis when it's linked clearly and continuously to what they want their brand to achieve strategically.

It isn't something they employ tactically, superficially or as a last resort every few years when growth slows down.

On the other hand, many other owners and managers still spend their marketing budgets inconsistently, instead of steadily investing them as they do with their research and development or training programmes. A strange strategy because when growth slows, as it invariably does, they're taken by surprise and have to dig deep to push on. It would be easier to maintain forward momentum if they invested their time, energy and budgets continuously rather than in sudden spurts, every now and then.

The most forward thinking have learnt to harness the value of branding by first understanding it, and then by managing it continuously – otherwise they find they stall. Branding is very powerful and yet it can't be just sprinkled on an organisation like fairy dust, creating instant and magical results. Some people unfortunately don't understand the depth, breadth and nuances of it or know how to manage it. As a result, they fail to appreciate its power and what it can achieve for them. Many incorrectly assume that a brand is just a logo – rather like the original form of branding simply used to differentiate one person's cattle from another. Accountants tend to think of a brand as an intangible asset on a balance sheet, albeit a very important and valuable one. Others firmly believe that branding should only be confined to the fluffy parts of their organisations and don't see how it can add real and significant value. These people are driven by spreadsheets, not emotion, which is a shame because branding actually embraces both.

Since this book is primarily for service-based organisations, it would be useful to define the meaning of a few key words before moving on.

For simplicity, I've decided to predominantly, but not exclusively use client to mean customer, consumer or user and I refer to you as a brand owner, regardless of your job title, or if you're self-employed, an entrepreneur or a business manager. I refer to the company, partnership, collective or charity that you work for as an organisation.

The Design Council (www.designcouncil.org.uk) defines a brand as a set of associations that people make with an organisation. Therefore branding is an attempt to harness, generate, influence and control these associations to help it perform better.

Service, according to the free encyclopaedia, Wikipedia ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Service_\(economics\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Service_(economics))), is an intangible commodity created for the benefit of the consumers of it. With no stock or raw materials to carry, the service is produced, personalised and consumed in the same instant.

A simple way to think of a service brand is as a promise of an experience yet to be enjoyed. Therefore branding a service is about setting the expectation for that experience in advance.

I've been fascinated by service-based organisations for many years because they have to address three specific issues that manufacturers and sellers of products simply don't have to face.

The first issue is the intangibility of their services which makes it difficult for consumers to evaluate or compare prior to experiencing them – without a guarantee.

The second issue is that a large component cost of the service is the people providing it – and as the quality of service depends on the quality of the people, labour costs go up year after year. The 'added value' segment has to be conjured up from somewhere or created in another meaningful way to justify these increases. In contrast, a manufacturer has more options to lower the cost of products sold.

The third issue is that differentiation is difficult. Traditionally, only the most established service providers were able to charge a premium for services because of their brand recognition. The advent of the web means consumers can now search the globe for a service provider that meets their specific needs. This presents both a challenge for market leaders and an opportunity for all those young pretenders.

This is why all service-based organisations need to manage their branding on an ongoing basis to help overcome these issues, grow consistently and be more successful. In doing so, they'll also transform their intangible services into tangible, highly differentiated ones that add value to their offers and help them to engage people in new ways. Design is the enabler here. It provides the discipline, the creative thinking and the structured process. This is because there is a deep and fundamental relationship between design and branding. The creative design component is what translates branding ideas into communication and sets the expectation of the service experience.

This all sounds good but how can you put branding to use? By being smarter about the way you use and measure the impact of it. Use it strategically and measure it against your organisation's key objectives – link it directly to your brand's performance. This encourages continuous innovation and renewal with more consistent growth. If you build a strong brand, you don't have to sell so hard.

One word of caution though. It isn't possible to achieve excellence in branding by hiring somebody who says they've done it before and letting them get on with it. You can't beat experiencing it yourself. You actually need to live it, breathe it, truly understand it and then learn to manage it. Like most things, the more you do the better you get and it will show through in your results.

However, your biggest challenge is not with the branding itself. It lies with motivating your people to provide excellent service by personifying your brand in precisely the way you want. The great news is that branding can be of real and significant help here too, by clearly and visually linking your strategy to you and your people and helping them to understand precisely what you mean. That's why it's vital to you and your future success.

Over the years, I've seen many service-based organisations fail to use branding properly because they don't know how to apply it. And yet they see it and recognise it working well for others. I'll be revealing the key insights that led me to develop 'Continuous Branding' as a strategic tool for everyone who is building their brand through their people and who want continuous and sustainable growth.

Continuous Branding encourages you to think differently about the experience you want people to feel every time they come into contact with your brand. This is important. I don't just mean when you want to sell to them, I'm talking about the entirety of your relationship with them. Far too many service-based organisations concentrate on the selling process and forget what it feels like to be neglected the rest of the time.

You'll also learn about the five simple principles that make up Continuous Branding in chapter 7. You'll be able to easily adapt them and place them at the heart of everything you do, regardless of whether you're in a business-to-consumer market, a business-to-business sector or operating in both at the same time. They'll help you change the way you do things by communicating clearly with your people and improving your clients' experience, whilst explaining how your brand is progressing.

Continuous Branding provides a more consistent return on investment in time, energy and money than re-branding every few years – which is what happens in most organisations. This is because there is a failure to firmly and clearly link Continuous Branding with an organisation's strategy which results in having to re-brand after a crisis which is not as effective as branding on a continuous basis.

Above all, Continuous Branding will help you improve your brand's performance because it removes confusion and complexity. It focuses on your clients, on the future, on the simple and on the tangible. It will make consistent and sustainable growth easier to achieve – and help smooth out the peaks and troughs. If you have the ambition and determination it can also help you be a leader in your market.

You've probably already identified the major issues facing your organisation that slow you up – and tried all the traditional ways of growing. You may even have already used design in different forms, but what if you haven't used branding strategically before? Don't worry, you're not alone. Inhale long and deep whilst I take you on your own branding journey! A journey that's totally unique to you and your brand. It has no straight lines to the end – because there should be no end. Only twists and turns along the way to greater success and continued growth.

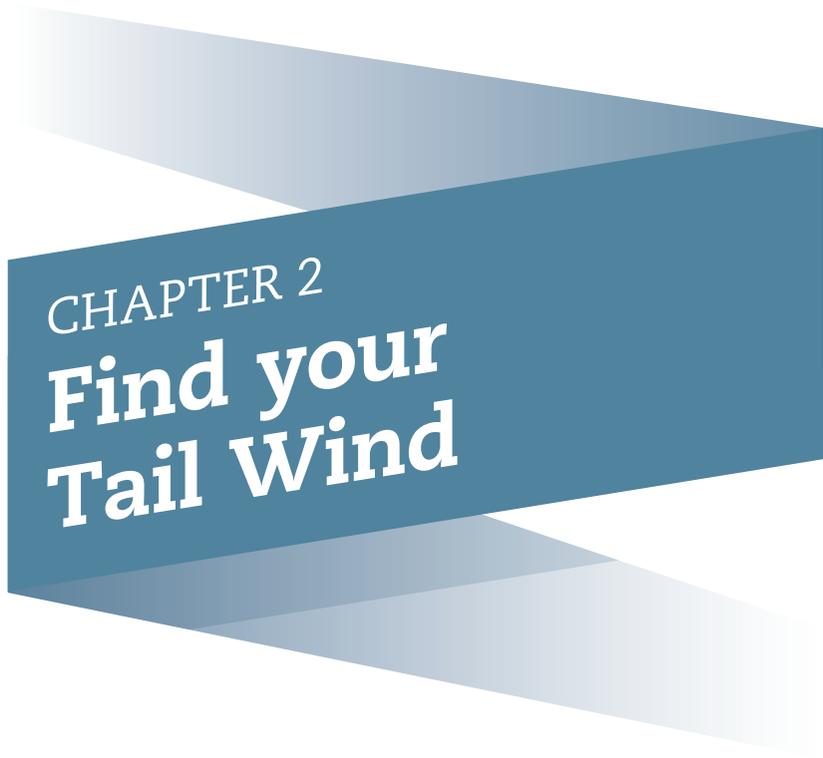
For inspiration, chapter 8 details how Greg Mace, Managing Director of Rapport Guest Services, a front of house services company, uses Continuous Branding to help build and maintain his brand as a market leader that's winning awards for excellent service.

Finally in chapter 9, I'll de-mystify the branding process itself, so that you can understand it and see how it actually works. You'll also be able to identify where you need specific help to achieve the results you want.

First though, in the next chapter I'll be revealing what some organisations use as a motor for growth and innovation.

Key points in this chapter

- Service-based organisations have to overcome issues that manufacturers of products do not – the intangibility of their services, market differentiation, adding value to their offers rather than cutting costs and engaging people in new ways.
- There is a fundamental relationship between branding and design to be exploited by those that recognise the existence and relevance of it.
- Continuous Branding is a strategic tool to be used by service-based organisations to grow consistently, sustainably and to communicate clearly.
- Measure the impact of branding against your organisation's key objectives and link it strategically to your brand's performance. This encourages continuous innovation and renewal with more consistent growth.

A 3D blue ribbon graphic, tilted and floating in the air. The ribbon is dark blue and has a slight shadow underneath it. The text is white and positioned on the front face of the ribbon.

CHAPTER 2
**Find your
Tail Wind**

Our world is changing rapidly. Opening up new opportunities at an exciting rate whilst closing down old ones for those too weak to keep up. Anyone running a service-based organisation is looking at different ways to grow their brand, revenue and margins whilst managing in a challenging environment.

Overcoming internal inertia and anything else that gets in the way is like sailing into a head wind. One of my clients described Continuous Branding as a 'tail wind', which is a neat analogy, because we all know how hard sailing into a head wind is day after day.

We make progress but we expend a lot of effort; everything seems harder to achieve and it takes longer to get where we want to be. On the other hand, having a tail wind makes the going a lot easier and we achieve what we want with far less energy.

The tail wind created by Continuous Branding makes it easier for your people to understand precisely what you mean, what you expect from them and gives them powerful reasons why they should get behind your brand – regardless of the specific jobs they do and whether or not they have direct contact with your customers or clients. On the other side of the coin, your competitors will find you're making their lives more difficult. You'll be slowing them down by taking the wind from their sails and forcing them to work a lot harder to get past you.

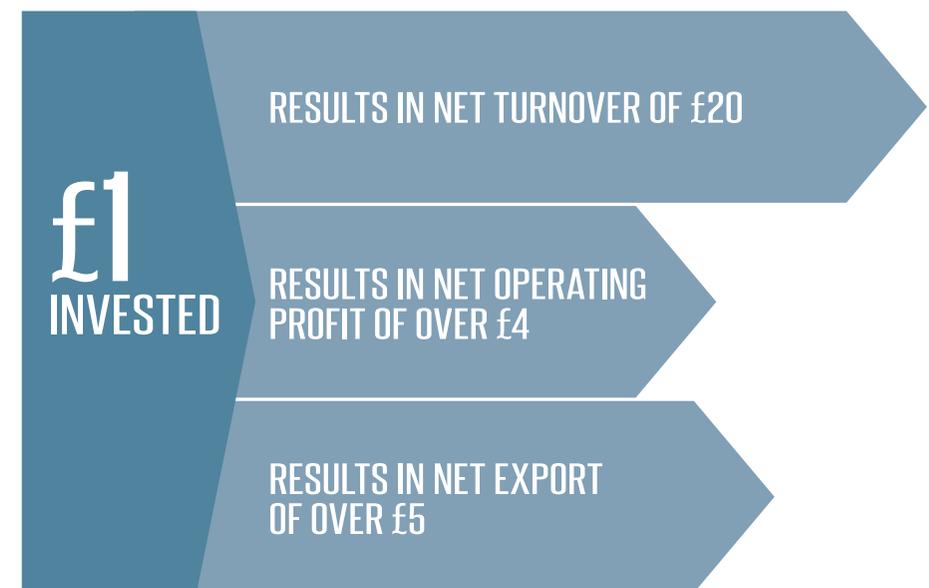
Continuous Branding enables you to focus clearly on your clients first, not on yourself or your own organisation. It seems to me that the thousands of business decisions made every year to make life easier for organisations often result in making things more difficult for their clients. You can't expect them to stay loyal if they feel overlooked, put out and put upon. Disillusioned, they become a prize prospect for a bright young entrepreneur who gives them a simple and easy way of engaging with their brand instead of yours.

EXAMPLE: Every one of us has felt the frustration of phoning a company to listen to endless recorded messages telling us which buttons to press before being put through to a 'real' person. How would you feel if your call was to make a complaint? You'd be furious by the time you eventually got through. I always press the option for the sales line, even if I have a complaint, because their calls are answered quickest. I wonder why that is?

If your goals are becoming more difficult to achieve and you're finding it harder to grow, you may reach a tipping point where you'll have to take decisive action. I know that you won't have sat still and will have attempted to make the path easier to traverse. Along the way you'll have tried all the traditional management techniques to grow or get out of trouble. Then you'll suddenly reach that point. You'll know precisely when you get there – telling yourself that you need to slightly re-fresh your brand. I can't predict your precise circumstances, but it will be for all sorts of different reasons. For example, you may find new competitors popping up ever more frequently. They may be genuinely offering better value and more innovative services or making all sorts of promises to win new contracts. Or your key people may have left to start up on their own. Alternatively, you may just have lost your edge. If you feel like you're coasting, not growing or even shrinking you need to face the issues and re-focus on what made your organisation great to start with. Then communicate this clearly. You might just need to freshen up your act or you may need to overhaul your brand more fundamentally with a new market position to support a new strategic direction. At a real push you might be forced to change your brand name as a result of a merger or acquisition.

You may have left your assessment so long your competitors have already re-positioned you without you even being aware of it. They'll have achieved this because their brands are now occupying the most desirable positions in the minds of your clients and your marketplace. Your brand has been unceremoniously relegated to a less advantageous position. That's why you've been finding it so hard to make progress and to grow. And that's why it feels like that head wind has been blowing stronger and stronger.

The power of branding is now acknowledged by many, with considerable supporting evidence for design acting as a mechanism or motor for growth and innovation. In 2013, research conducted by Warwick Business School on behalf of the Design Council (www.designcouncil.org.uk) interviewed forty eight leaders of world class companies and the main findings were that design is customer-centric and greatest when intimately related to solving customer problems. It is most powerful when culturally embedded, and best when it has strong senior management support and can add value to any size of organisation. Design also transforms the way that organisations think and work. Research has shown that for every £1 (US\$1.50) invested in design, the result is a net turnover of £20 (US\$32), a net operating profit of over £4 (US\$6) and a net export of over £5 (US\$8).



*This is based on research by Eden Partners:
Evaluating Designing Demand 2012 and
Centrifuge: Evaluation of Public Services by Design 2010.*

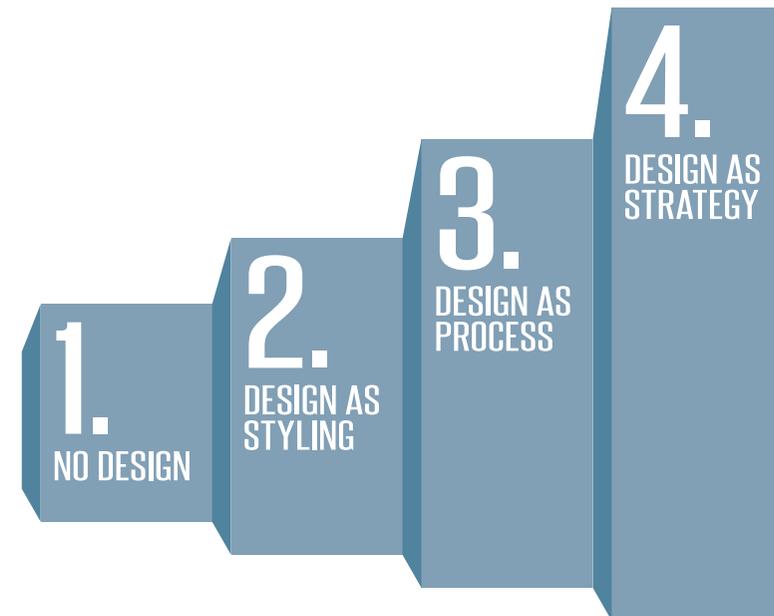
In 2003, to help assess the economic benefits of design in Denmark, the Design Ladder was developed by the Danish Design Centre (www.ddc.dk/ddc). It was used to identify the different levels of design being used in organisations within the country. Take a look at steps 3 and 4 – design is not simply an add-on but is used to structure development and strategy.

Stage 1: No Design. It plays little or no role in product or service development.

Stage 2: Design as Styling. It is only relevant in terms of aesthetic considerations such as style, appearance and ergonomics.

Stage 3: Design as a Process. It is considered in terms of a process or method in product or service output but is only employed at the initial stages of development.

Stage 4: Design as Strategy. It is integral to a company's continuous renewal of their business concept as a means of encouraging innovation, is fused with the key objectives and plays a role at every stage of development.



Design Ladder developed by the Danish Design Centre.

According to Sharing Experience Europe (www.seeplatform.eu/casestudies/Design%20Ladder), between 2003 and 2007, the distribution of Danish companies at stage 3 of the ladder rose from 35% to 45% and the number of companies at stage 4 rose from 15% to 20%. It serves as a model for explaining to organisations that design is more than merely about styling.

Awareness of the strategic importance of using design in both the private and public sectors is growing through the outstanding effort of the DBA (www.dba.org.uk), the trade association for design in the UK. It builds bridges between designers and organisations, and champions effective design. Through its close relationship with the Bureau of European Design Associations (www.beda.org) and other European partners it's also enabling better design management by governments across Europe. This is achieved by bringing design management training to the public sector using best practice from the private sector and adapting their set of successful design management tools (on-line from mid 2015). Despite the public sector commissioning billions of Euros in design services each year, the benefits of management and decision making around using the design process are not widely understood and therefore design thinking is not fully capitalised upon. Another project is helping exploit the full potential of design for innovation by making twenty one recommendations to the European Union to ensure design is at the heart of driving growth and prosperity in European economies.

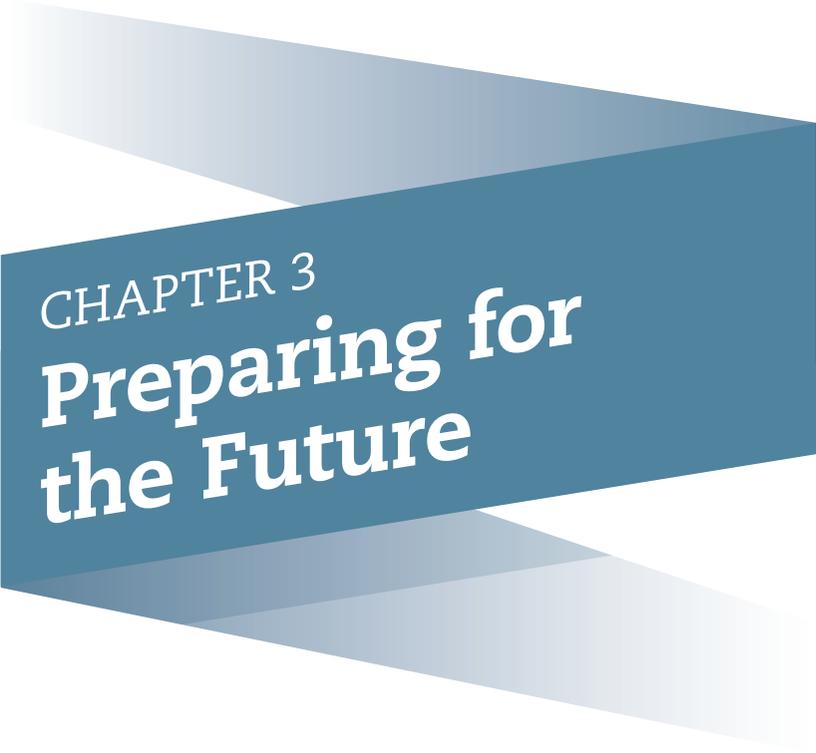
As we can see, there is significant interest in the strategic use of design at an international level. An increasing number of private and public sector organisations are using design in this way to drive growth for themselves, their country and for the European Union. You can use it in precisely the same way to help your brand grow by reaching out and engaging with the right type of clients. A note of caution here - only clients that are a good fit for your brand are actually desirable! In the business-to-business world the wrong types of clients will drain your resources by wasting your time and not wanting to pay the full price for it. They'll drive you down on costs, make thin promises about how much they'll spend with you and quibble over everything. It's best to refer them to your competitors which might slow them down, leaving you the 'clear water' and time to look for more of the right type of clients to help you grow your brand.

So regardless of whether you sell to other organisations or to consumers, to grow consistently your brand must be relevant to clients that are an ideal match and who are happy to pay for a quality service. Your brand needs to make a fair profit to enable you to provide them with the service they expect. You also need to recruit, train and develop the best people whilst delivering a decent return to your shareholders. By working with these clients you'll be able to satisfy everyone involved. If you compromise, sooner or later, you're going to disappoint yourself and the people around you.

In this chapter we've found out that more organisations are using design and branding strategically to drive growth, but there's so much change and turbulence going on in every market how can you stay ahead? The next chapter is all about preparing yourself and your brand for the future.

Key points in this chapter

- Recognise the feeling of a 'head wind' slowing you down, because Continuous Branding is like a 'tail wind', making progress a lot easier.
- There is considerable evidence for design acting as a strategic motor for growth and innovation. Design is more than merely styling. Organisations can incorporate it into their own particular way of doing things.
- Awareness of the strategic importance of using design in both the private and public sectors across the European Union is growing through better design management.
- Servicing the wrong clients will drain your resources. Your brand only needs to be relevant to clients that are an ideal match. Don't bother with the others, let your competitors struggle with them.

A 3D blue ribbon graphic, tilted and floating in the air. The ribbon is dark blue and has a slight shadow underneath it. The text is white and positioned on the top surface of the ribbon.

CHAPTER 3
**Preparing for
the Future**

What does the future hold? Change for certain – and lots of it. And most people find this a daunting and disruptive prospect. Anticipating which of these many changes will have the biggest impact on your brand is extremely challenging.

But anticipate you must, if you want your brand to be a leader and not a follower. In this chapter you'll learn why it's important your brand should have a point of view to help you make the most of the future.

The speed of change seems to keep accelerating. Simpler, quicker and cheaper ways of communicating will arrive with new technologies introduced by entrepreneurs to digitally disrupt traditional markets. The result is likely to be information overload with less time to think, rather than more. There will be a power shift from sales people to clients as access to the web provides the latter with far greater knowledge than ever before. Tens of thousands of new apps providing ever more interesting ways to interact will be launched resulting in the continued fragmentation of markets into smaller and smaller pieces. This will make it more difficult to reach clients using traditional marketing techniques.

Most markets will become more competitive, less formal and brands that save time and make life simpler will thrive. But that's not enough on its own. These brands must also explain why they do what they do and share their point of view. When there's little or no real differences between brands, having a more appealing point of view can make it easier and more reassuring for clients to choose that brand. And what is a point of view in this context? It's how a brand views the world, what it thinks is important, what it believes in, what obligations it has and how it behaves. This increases or creates demand for a service. In the business-to-business world this is described as 'thought leadership' or being an authority in a specialised field of expertise. This sounds a bit lofty and is not as friendly or engaging as having a 'point of view'.

In the business-to-business world of professional procurement, relying on having a point of view will only work when your organisation has ticked all the basic boxes in terms of your ability to provide the quality and reliability of service at a mutually agreed specification, and at an acceptable cost.

You're likely to feel rather buffeted by all this. However, the solution is not to completely re-brand every few years – this just doesn't work as well as it used to, and you won't achieve the results you need over the long term either. Making big changes suddenly after long periods of doing the same thing makes it harder for your people to keep up and your brand won't grow consistently unless you invest in it continuously.

If you have teenage children then you'll realise that we're also slowly being surrounded by what I call, 'the last minute generation'. Improved communications and the spread of social media make it far easier to chop and change plans within minutes of making them. To prosper, all organisations will have to be far more dynamic – anticipating, adapting and responding to change. Fast. The lack of speed and agility will be a major killer of brands in the future.

Many service-based organisations already find it hard to move quickly and the bigger they are the harder it gets. Perhaps it's easier to always do what they've always done, and then wonder why they always get

exactly the same results. To paraphrase a well known quote, the definition of insanity is to do the same thing over and over again and expect different results. However, some are facing up to the challenges of major upheaval in their markets to develop new and innovative services that make a significant impact on peoples' lives.

EXAMPLE: Barclays is a major global financial services provider with over 300 years of history, operating in over 50 countries and employing 140,000 people. The recent financial crisis and the introduction of new regulations and technological innovations are changing a fairly inward looking industry. According to research by the Warwick Business School, Barclays decided to be the most design focused and technologically cutting edge bank so it could deliver the best products, services and experiences in a rapidly changing world. According to Barclays' Chief Design Officer, "investing in design and focusing on improving customer experiences can lead to higher net promoter scores, which in turn, drives higher income and reduces complaints, thereby lowering costs".

Barclays Pingit is a mobile payment service that allows people to send and receive money using a mobile phone number. The development team worked collaboratively at the same time with operational colleagues, coders, developers and marketing people. This meant a faster time to market and being more grounded in customer insight than usual.

Pingit has been downloaded 2 million times, won over 20 awards for innovation and is proving a commercial success. It enhances the brand through a differentiated service and makes customers' lives easier.

Information about your organisation sifted from the web is allowing clients to engage with your sales people far later in their decision making process. Before they make personal contact, they know more about your organisation, about your people, your services and your competitors than was ever previously possible.

Before the web, your sales people would have talked with them to work out what they needed from the point of their first tentative enquiry. Services would then be tailored to their needs. In the future, clients will have the ability to combine self-serve information from the web with their knowledge of their own organisation to prescribe their own service solutions or design services entirely for themselves, with little or no interaction from your people at all. Artificial intelligence software will accelerate all this by taking the knowledge trapped within your experts and buried deep in your organisation and freeing it up for the creation of simple apps for your clients and your people. Of course, these apps will be accessible from anywhere and at any time. If you don't provide this knowledge someone else will and sales will be lost.

With developments like these, business-to-business sales people could be consigned to simply ticking boxes on forms in response to formal requests for information. Spending time with clients developing relationships and asking questions could all be a thing of the past. The sales team won't be any wiser about each potential client and they definitely won't be able to decide whether a contract is worth bidding for, or if they're going to be an ideal match for the brand or a massive drain on resources.

The web is the great leveller. It enables even the smallest players in your market to create an on-line presence that belies their size and maybe their abilities. Even if you're the current market leader, there will be entrepreneurs out there right now, perhaps as you're reading this, developing ideas that will revolutionise the way your clients find, then engage and buy services like yours. If you don't change the way you think, they'll disrupt the whole of your market causing you a struggle to adapt and survive. Size is simply not so important anymore – but service quality and the ability to deliver it definitely is. Being infinitely variable and flexible is also a great differentiator.

Over the last hundred years, society in the UK has become less deferential and less formal with the breakdown of the class system and gender equality. The ascendance of informal high tech brands like Apple, reflects this shift in the world of technology.

Founded in 1984, Apple has eclipsed formal 'white shirt, blue suited and sales led' corporations like IBM, that were established just over a century ago and were pre-eminent in computers at the time of Apple's birth in Steve Job's garage.

This phenomenon isn't just confined to the high-tech sector; every market is changing, not necessarily for exactly the same reasons – but the result seems to be the same. Less formality. For instance, some professional service firms like solicitors and accountants are becoming less formal, but without being less professional. It seemed to be most noticeable with dress-down Fridays. If it carries on like this some are even at risk of losing their ties altogether. Heavens above! But seriously, professional service firms are having to appear more friendly, more approachable and less stuffy but without appearing to be too frivolous or unprofessional either. It's a difficult balancing act, but one that has to be attempted. It wasn't that long ago that solicitors could not advertise at all.

EXAMPLE: Lennons Solicitors (www.lennonssolicitors.co.uk), a well established firm based in the UK, was rebranded to reinforce their independence in the face of significant changes in their market and to make them appear more friendly and approachable. The external launch event coincided with the firm's 30th birthday party, a perfect occasion to reveal their new brand. Personal invitations were sent out proclaiming 'You are invited to celebrate with a marquee full of solicitors... now that's a party!'

It's far easier for brands to flex and change on-line as the digital medium is easy and quicker to update than more traditional media. It's more difficult and costly to change physical items like signage and printed materials, especially if you are a retailer, for example, with hundreds or thousands of stores across continents.

However, advances in digital signage will provide flexibility and reward agile organisations with the ability to change what is being communicated as quickly and easily as changing their websites. This will enable very local messaging to be adopted in individual outlets that reflects the unique nature of the communities they serve.

Being agile, informal and making things simple for clients takes a considerable amount of thinking, planning and effort on behalf of your brand and your people. You have to consider the impact that all your decisions will have on your clients' experience and you need to manage every last detail of their brand journey in far greater depth and across many different channels. The rewards will be substantial as each of them will feel that your brand really understands their needs and is in tune with their aspirations. This will encourage them to invest time and effort into developing and sustaining a long term relationship with your brand; one that is far more difficult for one of your competitors to undermine with some snazzy, head turning, short term offer.

Less economically active people tend to be time rich and cash poor. If your clients are cash rich and time poor their most precious asset is evidently their time. If you can save them some of that, and at the same time make their lives easier – they'll love you for it. If you can make them look good and feel good as well, then you're really on to something. To achieve this you need to stay close to them, understand them deeply and understand the challenges they face every day. This is particularly important if you serve different markets since clients in each will have different issues and priorities.

So you design services that are useful, helpful and relevant and can make a positive difference to their lives. If you don't or you can't, then your most entrepreneurial, adept competitors most definitely will. If you sell to more than one market, then you already know that there are real differences between them. To appeal to the right type of clients in each market your brand must be flexible enough to make each of them feel like you really understand their individual needs regardless of how many other clients or markets you serve. A personalised experience of your brand is required. Services need to be planned, then designed around the client and the brand experience. And they need to have the ability to change quickly and to improve continuously.

From an outsider's perspective, and it's easy for me to say this, many service-based organisations are slow to change the way they think and make decisions out of the everyday norm. They employ great people, who are enthusiastic and very bright and yet they seem to find adapting to changes in their market a challenge. Why is this? After all, as human beings, we're highly flexible, adaptable and ingenious as a species. That's why we're so successful.

Why do they find it so hard? Is it some sort of corporate straight jacket that restrains them and only their individual ingenuity and energy that enables them to break away and escape? Or is it that they don't have a clear framework to work within, which always leads them to err on the side of caution? I can more easily understand slowness within manufacturers who require longer lead times for designing, prototyping, testing and tooling up for new products. Although some clothing retailers in Europe are adapting to volatile markets with an agile supply chain and shortening the product development cycle considerably to keep up with the latest fashion shoppers.

I don't think enough time and creativity is spent in explaining and demonstrating to the people who work for a service-based organisation why they should appear, behave and communicate in the best ways that personify the brand. On top of that, they're not then given sufficient authority and discretion to adapt

slightly and intelligently to unique circumstances or the client. That could be in a variety of situations - when serving them face-to-face or engaging with them via social media.

Most of your people will find change hard to cope with. Whilst we are highly flexible and adaptable as a species, the easiest course of action is to carry on doing things the same way they've always been done. Unless they're outward facing, your people may also struggle with the idea of change because they're simply not exposed to the everyday issues and pressures that your clients face. They cannot empathise with them because they're just not familiar with their problems and stresses. As a result they don't see any need to change the way they work. And of course, your people have guidelines and procedures to follow, which they'll continue to adhere to until you help them understand why they should change.

Finding a collaborative branding and design agency to work with will help you greatly. The relationship should be built on a mutual respect for each others opinions and yet be able to openly challenge each other in search of a better solution. This creative tension already occurs within the best agencies between different people because it's the engine for the best ideas. I'm advocating professional discussion and disagreement here, not intransigence. This is good for you because sometimes you can be too close to your

problem, especially if you've enjoyed a successful career and worked for the same organisation over many years. On the other hand, you have acquired a deep experience of your market so your viewpoint matters.

Depending on the size of your organisation, ensure the relationship between your internal design and marketing team with the rest of your organisation, and with external agencies is a tight one. The challenge will be to ensure that everyone works together more closely so they become part of the same seamless team. Each group brings important skills and experience to achieve Continuous Branding – all helping you grow your brand more easily and more consistently. Make sure you use them all.

The idea of merging groups or departments together to work smarter and faster is essential to Continuous Branding. We all know that people working in vertical silos end up slowing things down because it's trickier to talk to and influence people outside of their own silo. Many organisations are adopting internal social networks to break the barriers down which has to be good for everyone. They're also encouraging people at all levels to network freely so that ideas can be exchanged more quickly and easily.

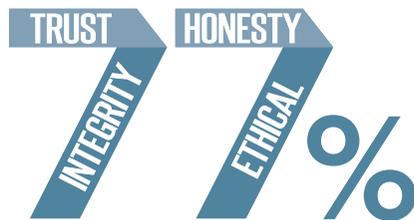
EXAMPLE: Pizza Hut in the UK has already combined the role of director of human resources and marketing because the restaurant operator understands that its people are its brand. This decision will pay dividends in the future because few foodservice businesses understand how the two functions can work so intimately together. They'll be more agile, more adaptable and more able to keep up with the changing tastes and expectations of their diners by merging the two departments together. There will be no more gaps between them and a better experience for their diners.

For any organisations that engage with clients in a physical environment like a store, restaurant, showroom or office closely integrating human resources, marketing and operations seems like a good idea because they're all so crucial to the brand experience. Despite the different skill sets and knowledge of the people within these different departments, they should all be joined seamlessly together for the sake of clients. When one group makes a decision to change something or cut a cost, there needs to be a way of understanding what the effect will be on the client experience.

People buy from brands that have the same point of view and share the same values as themselves. It's the same for politicians. Each party sets out their manifesto, and members of the public cast their vote at election time in support of the one they feel best represents them and their future security and prosperity.

Unlike political parties, developing a point of view is not something that service-based organisations find easy or do very well. They often try and be ‘all things to all people’ so they never actually develop or express a distinctive point of view themselves. This is because they worry it might alienate some of their clients; the result is they end up sounding indistinct from all the other brands in their market. Brands without a point of view are followers not leaders. Would you want to follow a follower or follow a leader?

This lack of a point of view makes it much harder for clients to ‘spot the difference’ between brands. The smaller the perceived difference between one brand and the next the harder it is to justify even the smallest premium between them. This puts pressure on margins, worsening as competition intensifies and the space between brands narrows further. Why make it difficult for clients to choose which brand is best for them?



To illustrate this point I looked at the brand values stated on the websites of thirty leading UK organisations and found fifty six different ones. Just over 77% of them shared one or more of these – Trust, Integrity, Honesty

and Ethical. All of these are essential for building brand loyalty. After all, would you buy from a brand that was dishonest, lacked integrity, was unethical or untrustworthy?

How many of these values does your brand share with these organisations? The greater the number, the more similar yours will feel to them and to your competitors; and the harder it is for clients to differentiate between you. Why make it difficult when there’s an easier and far more compelling way of creating that vital difference? You can achieve it by expressing a highly distinctive point of view that helps to clearly position your brand in the minds of your clients.

So given this, I find it surprising that many brands simply write out their values on their websites as bland statements. This is a dull way for clients to find out what a brand is like. Imagine if I introduced myself to you by saying, ‘Hello, my name is Craig Thatcher, I’m honest, ethical and you can trust me’. You’d be surprised and a little suspicious. You’d want to work out for yourself whether you liked me and whether you thought that I was trustworthy – not to be blandly told what to think by me within seconds of our first meeting. The only way for you to establish whether you trust me is to spend time talking to me, whilst assessing the way I appear, behave and communicate with you. Only then can you decide whether you trust me or not.

Most service-based organisations underestimate the power of making things simple for their clients. I think they get a little confused by the complexity of their own world and this is unintentionally revealed to their clients. I know it's difficult when they work at the leading edge of current thinking and have actually solved complex problems in the long, hard search to satisfy their clients needs. It must be very tempting to show off just a little bit when trying to demonstrate their capabilities.

Yet there is a premium to be enjoyed by keeping things simple. Designer and creator of highly desirable technology products, Apple, has this cracked. Their products are not the most technically advanced but they are very simple to use and they don't feel the need to reveal the inner workings of their massive global operations. They're a complex organisation with the design function in North America, manufacturing in the Far East and stores on-line and all across the world. They're a designer, manufacturer and retailer all in one. They're also an innovator of services. They've developed the hugely successful iTunes platform and the people at their Genius bars are experts at helping customers use their products and services, no matter what their level of experience. I applaud them for adding service to the retail experience whilst many others have been cutting staff to reduce overheads.

So what can we learn from Apple? Whether you like the company or not, their communications are simple to understand. Their on-line knowledge base is very helpful and they add service as a way of creating a great experience for everyone. They don't share their inner workings because they know it's counter-productive. In my opinion, a surprising number of service-based organisations do precisely this and freely expose their jargon. Only you can determine what is achievable in your particular market, but Apple does provide something to aspire to in terms of outward simplicity.

As well as transforming markets, Apple are also growing completely new ones by the simple fact that their products are so beautifully intuitive and can be used by everyone. My mother is in her mid 80s, and was a short hand typist in her twenties. She's never owned a PC nor got to grips with texting or voicemail on her ancient mobile phone. Yet recently, she asked me to help her buy an iPad to FaceTime my sister who lives in the West Indies. I would never have believed it possible that she would consider buying an Apple product. That's the power of simplicity and design over advanced technology.

Simplicity works for everyone. Look up Bruce Kananoff who talks passionately about 'simplifying your future' with a free ebook which has been downloaded over 30,000 times by people who want to achieve more from their career and life.

In a world where most organisations are stripping costs down to a minimum, reducing the quality of their service and expecting their clients to look after themselves there are great opportunities to do precisely the opposite. In so doing, you'll be able to use service as a differentiator, by adding people with great skills who can provide a highly memorable experience. Clients find this very difficult to replicate elsewhere, which will make your brand stand out and help you justify any premium. In short, you're adding real and tangible value to the relationship – and not just adding cost.

In this chapter we've found out that inertia makes changing direction difficult and not everyone sees change as a positive thing. For those that do see the benefits, the rewards are great. If you want to prepare for the future then brace yourself for more change, not less, and turn it to your advantage. If you're struggling in a market with lots of competitors all saying the same thing as you, then develop a loud and strong point of view to make it easier for people to choose your brand over another.

In the next chapter I'll introduce you to the idea of thinking of a brand as a person. There are two reasons for using this as an example. The first is that it's easier to explain what a brand and branding is. The second is that your people personify your brand and the way your clients relate to it is strongly influenced by them.

Key points in this chapter

- Explain why you do what you do, then develop and share your point of view to make it easier for clients to choose your brand.
- Having a point of view increases or creates demand for a service, and brands without one will always be followers not leaders.
- Create services that are useful, helpful and relevant to your ideal type of client to save them time and make their lives simpler.
- Agility, flexibility and informality are prized attributes for all service brands as the world speeds up around us.
- Re-think and re-organise the way your people work together and with third party agencies and suppliers to help you provide a better brand experience.
- A company's size no longer matters as much as quality of service.
- There is a premium to be enjoyed by keeping things simple.

CHAPTER 4

**Think of a Brand
as a Person**

To understand branding at the most basic level, it helps to think of a brand as a person. This taps into the same sort of relationships and emotional connections that people have with each other – as they do with brands.

The ability to think like this is especially useful to a service-based organisation like yours which relies so heavily on your people to engage your clients. Your people are the ones who personify your brand and help you build it through the way they appear, behave and communicate.

Your clients relate to your brand like they do to people in their lives. This is because they treat their relationship with your brand just like all their other relationships. They probably have many friends but few real loves. If you want them to love your brand rather than just like it – be useful, be helpful and be relevant to them. Think about this for a minute. At a fundamental level your brand must be useful otherwise why does it exist? It needs to be helpful because an unhelpful service brand is a contradiction. Your brand must also be relevant to your clients because irrelevance is a death knell. And the real trick is to be relevant to the right type of client – not all clients are an ideal match for your brand.

Let's start at the birth. Our baby is given a first name and a family name. In other words a brand name. People change their name for a variety of reasons because they're no longer happy with it. Muhammad Ali changed his name from Cassius Clay shortly after converting to Sunni Islam. His name no longer fitted his beliefs and values. Others change their names because they want to run away from their past, or because they've done something they shouldn't have.

Probably the most usual reason to change your name is upon marriage – akin to a merger in brand terms. And the converse is married women who keep their maiden names either permanently, or in the workplace, because they attach importance to the personal recognition, values and history associated with their name. All these scenarios are easily transferable to the world of brand names.

EXAMPLE: I'm often asked whether I'd ever change a brand name. This should only be seriously considered if it has gone bust or let them down really badly. Carphone Warehouse is a more typical example – the name was a description of what the company did when it was founded in 1989. This was at a time when most portable phones were too bulky to carry and were called car phones. You wouldn't start a new business with a name like this now because the world has moved on. But you wouldn't change it either because it's been successful and is well recognised, merging in 2014 with Dixons Retail plc to create 'Dixons Carphone'. The word 'Carphone' was kept because of the valuable brand recognition and heritage that has been built up over more than twenty years. It would have been a costly mistake to rename and expunge a highly recognisable brand name from the record.

Getting back to our baby, if it has siblings then they'll probably share a physical family resemblance. But as they grow up, they'll find their own niches and don't tend to compete directly with each other for the same parental time and resources.

If you own or manage more than one service brand it's vital that you enable each of them to develop their own personality, skills and experience based on their particular market niches, otherwise they'll compete with each other rather than simply performing in their own respective markets.

EXAMPLE: Global automotive manufacturer, Volkswagen AG, has a very successful multi-brand strategy to grow sustainably into the best automaker in the world by 2018. It aims to do this by becoming a world leader in customer satisfaction and quality, and to be the top employer across the world. It plans to increase sales to more than 10 million units and achieve an operating profit margin of at least 8% before tax to create a solid financial position. Major components like engines and floorpans are shared across models. The company has streamlined the manufacturing processes so that parts are delivered just-in-time and assembled on flexible production lines that can be used for different brands and different models, so deploying capacity more flexibly across the whole group.

On the other hand, they're very careful about developing individual brands that appeal to every sector of the vehicle buying market whilst minimising the cannibalisation of sales of more expensive models with cheaper ones. This enables them to squeeze the most profit out of every vehicle. They achieve this with a mix of brand positioning, marketing, product design and managing the driver's after-sales experience. More expensive vehicles have better showrooms, higher service standards and specifications than their cheaper brands.

How many of us could tell the difference or would be bothered about a windscreen washer bottle that was made out of 1mm or 2mm moulded plastic? But we'd most certainly notice whether the quality of the steering wheel justified the price we were being asked to pay.

I appreciate that it's easier to achieve this difference with physical products than with services but the principles remain the same. It just means that if you have a multi-brand strategy then the individual brands should be clearly differentiated from each other by targeting them at specific segments. It also means that the way your people personify each of your brands should be different depending on the one they're representing. This only becomes hard to achieve when your organisation blurs the lines by relaxing the standards of appearance, behaviour or communication that defines each brand.

When our baby becomes a child and old enough to sign their own name, it's unique to them. It's like their own personal logo. Their genetic DNA and their parents' values help to determine their personality and this is expressed by their appearance, and the way they behave and communicate.

As they become teenagers, they make friends with individuals who share the same values as themselves and who like doing the same things. They learn from each other through shared experiences and they provide each other with help and support when needed.

Whilst some are serious about their relationships from an early age, others fall in and out of love. And quickly! When my son was fourteen, he told me he'd already had three girlfriends. Whilst this was a bit of a surprise to me, he did go on to say that his first girlfriend lasted two months, the second two weeks and the third for double maths!

People relate to brands in exactly the same way as they do with the rest of their relationships. Some chop and change brands as quickly as they change their hairstyle, make-up or clothes – just like teenagers do. They're always in tune with the latest fashion. Others fall deeply in love and are extremely loyal to each other over a lifetime. As a brand you want yours to be in long term relationships, not picked up for a one night stand – only to be dumped by text days later.

Have you ever wondered why so many people marry somebody at work? It's to do with values they share with the brand they work for and with each other; so they feel comfortable. After all they both joined the same organisation because they liked what it does, liked what it stands for, liked the ethos and the brand itself. It's a good start for a relationship!

Likewise, you want your clients to fall in love with your brand. They form an image of your brand in their mind using all their senses; sight, hearing, smell, touch and taste.

If you manage the way your brand appears, behaves and communicates with your clients by tapping into all their senses, then you'll provide a powerful experience for them. As a result it will be stronger and far more memorable. Anything at all that detracts from that makes it harder to persuade them that your brand is the best choice for them.

When a person sets up their home it says a lot about them as an individual, even without them being physically present themselves. So imagine if you looked around the home of a person you didn't know; something like the popular UK television programme 'Through the Keyhole' hosted by Keith Lemon. How would you work out what this person was like as an individual?

You'd use your senses to assess the following sorts of questions. What style is the house? How is it decorated and furnished? Is the garden well kept or over grown? What does the home smell like? Then in to the kitchen. I know Keith inspects the cleanliness of the oven but personally, I'd be interested in the quality of their cutlery. I know this sounds rather off centre, but I'm not keen on light-weight, flimsy knives and forks. They just don't feel right in the hand when you're eating. They can spoil the whole experience unless you're having a picnic when compostable cutlery feels more appropriate. All these types of things say a huge amount about you as an individual – without anyone even meeting you face to face.

So imagine letting your clients into your offices, showroom, restaurant or store without you or any of your people there to interact and sell to them. What would they think about your brand? They'll think precisely what their senses tell them and if you've not managed every aspect of that environment then the visual, audio, olfactory and overall quality clues may not present your brand as you want it to be perceived.

EXAMPLE: A few years back, we treated our grown-up children to a Christmas Day lunch at a luxury hotel on the Thames. The whole family had high expectations and it was a change from our tradition of me cooking lunch on Christmas Day. It wasn't a cheap experience either – you have to recompense people well to work over the holidays. But my heart and expectations dropped as we were welcomed at the door by the gentleman offering to take our coats. Behind him was a rack of cheap wire hangers. They just don't look or feel as good as wooden ones. They leave tell-tale marks in jackets and coats even when used for short periods of time. My expectations of the quality of service and our lunch plummeted in an instant. I'll spare you the rest of the saga as it all went seriously downhill from there. Just to say that the whole afternoon of service and food presentation perfectly matched the quality of those wire coat hangers.

Now what about your people and how easy they find it to personify your brand? Their appearance, behaviour and way they communicate will change depending on their circumstances – whether they're at home with their family, socialising with friends, or at work surrounded by colleagues, their boss and clients. For some, it will only be small changes whilst for others they will be significant. It all depends on how well matched your brand's values are to that person. The closer the match between your brand's values and theirs, the better they'll relate to your clients. You already recruit for attitude and values and not entirely for skills because changing the former without deep indoctrination cannot work in the long term.

When people have the right attitude and approach you can encourage and train them to personify your brand. Once you're confident in them, you'll need to give them the authority and discretion to flex their appearance, behaviour and communication depending on the particular situation in hand. This will help make your brand appear nimble and flexible rather than slow and unresponsive. Clients' expectations never stand still and markets are always shifting. In the same way that everyone needs to continuously learn new skills and experiences throughout their lives so they don't fall behind their peers, a brand needs to continuously develop, or it too, will fall behind the market.

As your clients' needs, expectations and aspirations change, you'll be able to alter the way your people engage and interact with them as well. Continuous change is built into your organisation so you don't have to stop and start!

So why don't all organisations do this? I can't answer that, but like most people I'm often disappointed by the quality of service I receive from airlines, banks, retailers, restaurants and trades people. What is the worst experience that you've ever had?

EXAMPLE: This bad service experience ranks at the top of my long list. When my son was about three years old he started to call a little rural pub near where we live – The Maniac's Pub after an experience there that was memorable for all the wrong reasons. My wife is a vegetarian and as it

was her birthday meal, I called into the pub the week before and booked a table with a young man. We agreed there and then what the vegetarian options would be. He reassured me that he'd organise the necessary ingredients and brief all the relevant people at the pub. We turned up at the agreed time but were worryingly greeted with a totally blank look. My heart sank. He disappeared off behind the bar and shortly afterwards, wild shouting erupted followed by furniture being thrown around upstairs. When he re-appeared he was being chased by the landlady. Their argument continued but finished abruptly with her shouting at him 'You're fired!' He then jumped on his motorbike and sped off into the distance. Needless to say, we went home without eating!

No matter how many times that pub has changed hands and changed names over the ensuing years – in our family it is always called The Maniac's Pub. We've applied our own unshakeable branding and it will never fully regain its position in our minds as a pretty and serene country pub. This is an interesting point because it is customers who think they 'own' a brand not the pub owner or landlady.

When you have a strong emotional connection with somebody it's hard to let them down or completely walk away, no matter how bad things are between you. The most obvious example of this is the inherent and powerful bond between a mother and her child.

As a service-based organisation you need to be

able to create an emotional connection between your brand and your clients. I don't mean some soft, wishy-washy kind of emotion either. I mean ones that are anchored by deep, relevant and meaningful reasons as to why they think your brand is the best one for them and their organisation. Ones that are so strong they seem to defy logic.

There is a final reason why you should think of a brand as a person and that's the emergence of 'personal branding'. You've probably noticed that it's taken off since it was first used and discussed by Tom Peters, the business author and speaker. It's the practice of people marketing themselves and their careers as brands with success coming from packaging their presence on and off line. Their physical appearance is obviously based on their body, hairstyle and clothing, and their behaviour and the way they communicate comes from their knowledge and experience. When all packaged together it provides a strong image occupying a unique position in our minds.

Personal branding is generally for business people, entrepreneurs and celebrities who use their names to endorse their own products or other people's brands. This is an interesting phenomenon when you think about what happens when a person is working on behalf of a service-based organisation. What has the most influence over clients? The personal brand or the service brand? Or is it a balance of the two? If it's the latter then how is this managed?

We know that clients like to buy from experts and from the people whose values they share. Many larger service-based organisations think their corporate service brand is more important to clients than the expertise of the individuals who sell to, and support them. It's a mistake to underestimate the power of these individuals and the strength of their personal brands. Although it's understandable why most organisations don't ever manage to balance them perfectly because it's a difficult task. You need to be proactively managing the relationship between your service brand or brands and the people who work for them.

What generally happens is the service brand doesn't allow the personal brand to be expressed and ends up being perceived as stuffy, corporate and out of touch in today's world. The trend now is for most clients to want a more personal, less formal and rigid relationship with brands. Besides, they have a lot more choice from owner managed brands or young entrepreneurial start-ups. This helps explain why individuals or small groups often break away from their corporate employers to set up niche service brands that tempt clients to leave with them.

In the next chapter I'm going to encourage you to focus on what's great about your brand – because great it is – and if you want to make it better you need to know where to focus your efforts.

Key points in this chapter

- People relate to service brands like their other personal relationships, using all their senses to set their expectation before actually experiencing the service itself.
- People with the right attitude and approach will personify your brand. Give them authority and discretion to flex their appearance, behaviour and communication depending on the particular situation in hand.
- If you have more than one service brand within your portfolio, make sure that the skills, experience and personalities enable each of them to compete strongly in their respective markets, and not with each other.
- Proactively manage the relationship between your service brand or brands and the personal brands of the key people that work for them.

A 3D blue ribbon graphic, tilted and floating in the air. The ribbon is dark blue and has a slight shadow underneath it. The text is white and positioned on the top surface of the ribbon.

CHAPTER 5
**Your Service
Brand is Great**

Your people are a crucial part of your brand and the way they personify it defines your clients' experiences. Unlike a product, your service is an unknown quantity to new clients until the very critical point of delivery and consumption.

Up until then, it exists only as an intangible promise. You can't expect new clients to know precisely what the quality of your service is like until they've actually tried it for themselves – no matter how well you explain what it's going to be like.

Regardless of the size of organisation, leaders set the tone and culture. They have to be confident, inquisitive and crave new ways of thinking and behaving if they're going to grow their brand. They must also take brave, but not reckless decisions, even when those around them are not sure what to do. They also have to identify and face up to difficult issues by picking people with the right skills to help them achieve their goals.

EXAMPLE: A good example of how branding can help improve performance is Restaurant Associates (www.restaurantassociates.co.uk). In 2014, the corporate caterer and restaurant operator was awarded Business & Industry Caterer of the Year at the Foodservice Catey Awards. The judges were particularly impressed with how the brand had been re-positioned and was growing. The numbers were impressive and based on a turnover of £150 million (US\$ 235 million), client retention rate was 95%, employee engagement was up 6%, net promoter score was up a very impressive 45% and sales were also up 13%. "Producing tangible and enviable results", the judges' words, not mine.

Three and a half years before, the company acknowledged the things they weren't doing right. It had lost its edge and reputation, so they put together a tailored strategy with a branding agency to address those issues. It's impressive for a division of such a big company to do that. This was largely down to the bravery and leadership of Managing Director at the time, Andy Harris.

All service brands are built by the people who provide the service. So the people need to understand the organisation's culture, the 'promise' to clients and how to put this into practice every day. Motivating them all to move forward in the same direction is challenging but can be very rewarding. Continuous Branding will not make up for inconsistent, poor or over-priced service because the whole point of branding a service is to set expectations for precisely what the brand promises – with tangible clues so there are no disappointments.

Your clients' expectations are set as they progress through every stage of their journey. The longer it is, the more opportunities you have – but you also increase the chances of losing them, so try and keep it as short as possible without pressurising them unduly.

Your clients look for visual, audible and/or physical clues to assess the quality of the service that they think they'll experience from your brand. If you define precisely what that experience is going to be then you can demonstrate to your people precisely how you expect them to provide it. It's one thing setting expectations but how do you then encourage your people to exceed them? You can do this by explaining why your brand exists, and why they're such an important part of building it. In the following example it's the students who are the key link between the hotel and the guests' experience.

EXAMPLE: The Edge Hotel School (www.edgehotelschool.ac.uk) is the first hotel school of its kind in the UK and is based at Wivenhoe House (www.wivenhoehouse.co.uk), which is open to paying guests, and students enjoy a unique learning experience there. They study to achieve a degree in Hotel Management and are able to work alongside hospitality professionals helping to run Wivenhoe House, a real-life, four-star country house hotel. Having created the brand identity, the branding agency proposed the strap line 'Intriguingly Different', to arouse curiosity and conversation between guests and the students. And there's plenty to talk about – the architecture of the 18th century old house, the new, contemporary garden wing, the historic stories of previous owners, the parkland painted by British artist, John Constable and of course, the unique way the hotel is set up and run. The most inspiring stories are being created by the current students who practice there and will become future leaders in the hospitality industry.

Although setting an expectation of the quality of service is important, nothing is more important than the service experience itself. So when you're designing the service, make sure you consider every last tiny detail. However small, insignificant and apparently unrelated you think these details are, they give subtle cues to your clients that help to raise or lower their perception of the quality of their experience. In the next example, you wouldn't believe that there could be such a strong correlation between the quality of flat pack furniture instructions and the overall buying and assembly experience. So what elements could be having an effect on your brand experience?

EXAMPLE: I managed a project re-designing flat pack furniture assembly instructions for a leading UK multi-channel retailer. To assess whether the new instructions made any difference to the assembly process, one group of customers received the old instructions and a second group received the new ones. Both groups were interviewed afterwards by phone with an identical set of questions. The results revealed that customers with the new instructions felt their whole buying and assembly experience was much better than they'd expected and they were significantly more likely to make a repeat purchase than the group who had the old instructions. This neatly highlights the impact of just one component part of the journey on the overall brand experience – and ultimately on customer loyalty. Powerful stuff indeed.

If you're looking to save costs then cut them where your clients won't notice them. For instance, something as small as using wire coat hangers instead of wooden ones at front of house can affect your clients' perception of the quality and value of your whole service proposition. You won't pick up on this until it's time to charge for your service. If your prospective client has had their perception of quality lowered, then they won't be keen to pay your asking price – even if it's the most competitive you can offer. Anyone can cut the wrong costs. It's knowing the right ones to cut which make the difference to your success.

We all know that people don't buy from companies, they buy from people. Actually, they prefer to buy from experts they like and not faceless companies they don't. So don't hide your experts away. These people are the real, and only difference, between your brand and the next one. Never ever underestimate the advantage they bring. Given the choice, why would anyone buy from somebody they don't relate to, or even like? Would you?

When it comes to showing your people how to personify your brand you need to bring out the very best performance in them – by making them feel valued, important and cared for. This boosts their self-worth and if they feel good about themselves, they'll feel good about your brand too. Indeed, they'll buy into your brand themselves and feel motivated and engaged to deliver it to the very best of their ability.

There are many different ways you can achieve this – it's for you to use the ones that work best for your people and your brand. Small shifts in behaviour can lead to bigger shifts in thinking and result in a dramatic effect on the experience of your brand.

As your world becomes more competitive you need to provide personalised brand experiences that are unique to each of your clients. It might sound far fetched if you have many clients but remember that your brand is an ideal match for a certain type of client. They're going to be more similar to your brand and to each other than you probably think. This means you'll

be able to develop highly engaging and personalised experiences for your brand to share with them. Don't be afraid to surprise them in unexpected ways because they're far more likely to remember the experience if it was better than they expected in some distinctive way. Think out of the ordinary. And don't constrain yourself to always doing things the 'normal' way. It may only be a small way, but it will be different and memorable for it. Positive, memorable experiences are likely to be shared with others and spread the word about your brand on a very personal level.

All except the smallest of companies can be slow to make decisions and adapt, especially when they have to make big changes because they haven't invested continuously. Inertia occurs because people are uncertain about the future. Their futures. If you build change into your organisation as part of your operational model then you'll be in a far better place going forward.

The lack of speed and agility increases the mortality rate and brands die out because they simply run out of time through procrastination and stagnation. Assuming that there isn't something fundamentally wrong with your service, you don't have to be the best in the world but if you have speed on your side then you'll have a far greater chance of staying in the race, than if you don't. This also means you don't have to re-brand every few years when growth slows because you're committed to Continuous Branding and all the benefits it brings.

There's no longer enough time to be cautious. Everything is moving so fast that some retailers, for example, have changed their mind-sets completely. They're finding it's better to try something new on a small scale – fail – then learn from that mistake and move on, rather than spend ages thoroughly testing something only to find the opportunity has been lost or the market has taken a step in a different direction. It pays for them to have a backup plan for when things go wrong, as they can. This way of thinking is in direct contrast to the way they used to work, with new ideas being developed and tested, then trialled over a period of time in a number of stores before being rolled out across the entire estate.

The way your organisation delivers services every day makes the single biggest difference to how successful your brand will be over the long term. I bet you're thinking, 'that's totally obvious'. But if you maintain consistency every day, you'll blow most of your competitors away as the majority don't concentrate hard enough on getting the basics right 100% of the time.

EXAMPLE: I'm frequently disappointed by skilled trades people when I want work done in my home. Rarely do I select someone on the cheapest quotation and I've often chosen simply on the basis that they've turned up for an appointment on time and produced a quotation in a reasonable time scale. Others may not have made it to the initial meeting at all, or couldn't be bothered to provide a quotation. If your market is competitive – you have to work

hard on the basics. Once a tradesman has received my go ahead, they often don't fulfil the job right first time round either. Work has to be re-done because they've not listened to the brief, asked the right questions or recorded what was agreed. Think of the wasted time and cost of materials, plus the hit to their profitability because of their inefficiencies. When my son was a teenager and got his first holiday job with a local retailer, I told him his first task was to make sure he turned up on time every day – and that way he would beat off 95% of the other new starters. This turned out to be shockingly and depressingly true. Many of them couldn't get out of bed on time for their shifts and soon lost their jobs. At the most basic level I know that as an employer, I want good reliable people.

Your organisation will probably provide a mixture of formal and informal training and personal development opportunities to help your people be the best they can. You should also spend time talking to them about your brand, what it means to you and your clients, and why you do things the way you do. How you achieve this should be specific to your organisation. It should begin with all your existing people and be undertaken at regular intervals to continually reinforce your brand values. It can be demonstrated with inspirational stories of your people engaging with your clients. Individuals or groups should be praised and thanked for their outstanding behaviour and excellent service. Or perhaps they should be recognised for learning new skills and changing the way they engage with colleagues. You may want to formalise and ritualise all of this at an annual award ceremony, or make it a more casual

affair. Whichever way you deal with it, your people will see their peers being recognised and rewarded for the fantastic way they personify your brand. I do know that successful service brands have detailed inductions, backed up by recognition and reward programmes that communicate precisely what the brand stands for and how everyone is expected to personify it.

How do you achieve this? The creation of multi-sensory personalised experiences will allow your people to see your service brand perform. Give some thought as to how they should see it in action, hear it, taste it and smell it for themselves. By exploiting their senses, the experience will be memorable and they can more easily carry it forward to personify your brand at the point of delivery. In smaller organisations everything is a lot less formal, but nevertheless these activities can still take place – just on a less grand scale, but no less impactful. How do you want to personify your brand for your clients? It's not good enough just to issue instructions to everyone without explaining how they should be interpreted. If you talk about it you'll make it easier for your people to do their jobs – better results will be achieved and your brand will grow more consistently.

EXAMPLE: To support the re-branding of a business services brand, the design agency proposed that a light hearted learning tool based on a board game should be used to communicate, reinforce and discuss the brand values for new starters as well as old hands. It helped to ensure everyone was clear about what they needed to do every day, and why they should do it. The learning tool was designed to change their thinking and the way they should work together to improve efficiency, without sacrificing the quality of the brand experience for their clients. The game posed questions to each of the players in turn and how well they answered these determined how fast they completed the game. The tool provided managers with a very simple, practical and personal way of engaging small groups of people together – discussing the issues raised and the answers. It proved to be very successful.

Look at the tools you already have access to. See how social media impacts on the way people talk about and engage with brands – and provides them with personalised brand experiences. Take Twitter as an example. It was conceived and developed as a real time conversational tool. It's very immediate with breaking news, trending topics, or simply chatter. Dick Costolo (@dickc), CEO of Twitter, says they aim to be “the indispensable companion to life in the moment...”. This quote appeared in the Twitter feed of Rory Cellan-Jones (@ruskin147).

To get the most from Twitter you have to learn the art of conversation and be ready to engage and interact. This opens up huge opportunities for brands and branding. It's a means of projecting the finer points of your brand's personality to a very interested audience and a unique brand experience all at the same time.

Many organisations are also experiencing that Twitter is being used to broadcast complaints about poor service. Whilst uncomfortable for the organisation involved, this can only be a good thing if it improves the quality for everyone.

In an article, '10 reasons why people follow brands on Twitter' @TwitterAdsUK cited a key insight from research by Nielsen (@Nielsen). Here it is: "...Twitter users following brands are keen to hear more from those brands. This suggests there is a major opportunity gap waiting to be filled by brands that can develop engaging accounts."

The word 'engaging' is the most important word in that quote. You can do the usual marketing 'stuff' which obviously has great merit – promoting your brand, imparting sleek sales messages, posting beautiful brand imagery and running promotions and competitions. But brands can't just parade around and shout a lot on Twitter. That would be two dimensional and boring. Brands need to embrace those 'oh so fabulous in-between bits'! They're all those 'life in the moment' chances to talk to people and perhaps more importantly

– a chance to listen to what they're saying about your brand. The chance to be witty and charming. The chance to be warm and show integrity. The chance to make a difference to someone's day. The chance to be cheeky, if you dare and it's appropriate. The chance to join in and be 'on trend' within the wider world. The chance to give out information. The chance to right wrongs. In short, the chance to be helpful, useful and relevant in a far less formal way and yet with plenty of personality!

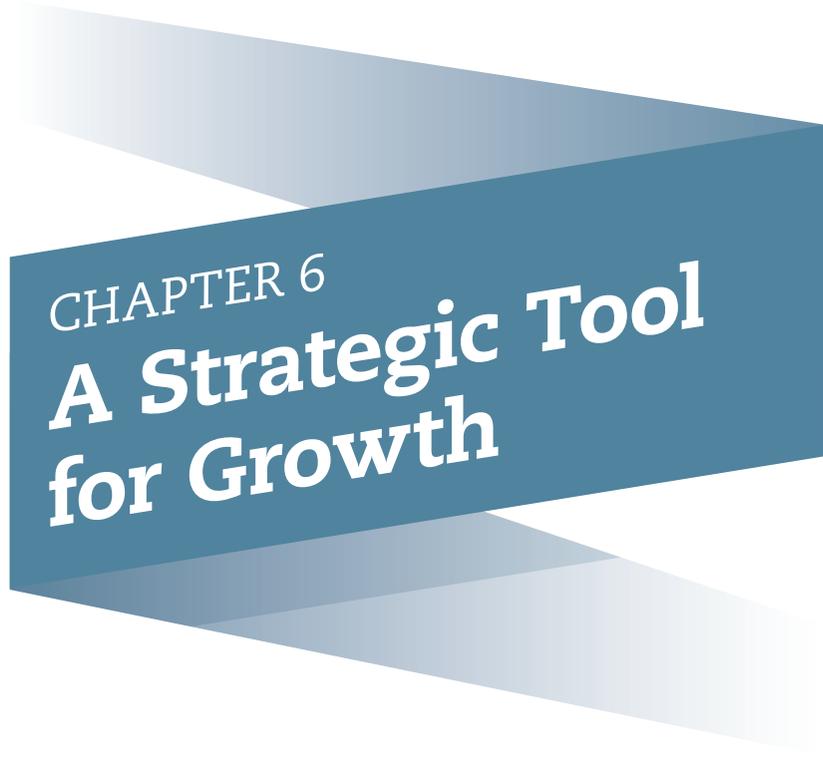
You can really bring your brand to life on people's screens – but it needs to look effortless and a seamless delivery of your brand's persona. In reality, it requires considerable investment in strategy, creativity, planning and organisation. It also needs enough savvy, well briefed Tweeters, able to think on their feet, and deliver content and responses in line with your brand strategy. Not an inconsiderable task! Get it right and it'll make clients feel good about your brand and they'll buy in on a very personal level.

In this chapter I've covered the importance of the client journey, setting expectations and providing personalised experiences to lead your brand and your people to higher performance.

In the next chapter, I'll explain how my findings and insights led to the development of Continuous Branding – and how its five principles could help you to consistently grow your service brand.

Key points in this chapter

- People don't buy from companies, they buy from people. Actually, from experts they like – so don't hide yours away. They are your only real point of difference, so make the most of them.
- Spend time talking to your people about your brand, what it means to clients and why you do the things the way you do.
- To personify your brand, make your people feel valued, important and cared for and you'll bring out the best performance in them.
- To outshine your competitors, provide personalised experiences for your clients that they'll find memorable and will want to share with others.
- Small shifts in behaviour can lead to bigger shifts in thinking and a dramatic effect on your clients' experiences of your brand.



CHAPTER 6
**A Strategic Tool
for Growth**

The flow of the world economy influences everything, whilst the arrival of new technologies and changes in legislation cause more obvious buffeting.

In the UK, the self employed and entrepreneurial start-ups proliferate and they are targeting ever smaller market segments. This means that most markets with low barriers to entry are being turned upside down and shift relentlessly.

Against this backdrop, it's vital to keep growing because a growing organisation is dynamic, forward looking and creates more opportunities for everyone – a far better place for you and your people, your clients, as well as your suppliers and shareholders.

It upsets me when I see brand owners of service-based organisations wasting their time, effort and money when I know they're ambitious for growth and they're still not achieving it. They don't recognise that a different way of doing things could make a big difference to how consistently they might grow in the future.

Having helped many of my clients over the years to understand the power of branding and how to use it better, I wanted to find a way of reaching out to more people so they could achieve greater performance and success by growing more easily and more consistently. In this chapter, I show why the best service-based organisations grow so consistently whilst others don't and what they're actually doing to achieve it. Successful ones already recognise that branding and design are essential components for growth and innovation regardless of their size. Yet service is still under valued as a key differentiator by many. Receiving excellent service makes people feel fantastic and creates the most memorable of experiences. Of course, the reverse is also true.

Over the last few years, I've asked searching questions of my clients of all sizes from start-ups to multinationals, then looked for common patterns in their responses, their thinking, behaviour and communication that I could attribute to only the most successful. I've had to look deep because the differences between the best and the rest are often small, just like in the world of sport where the margins between winners and losers are slim.

I've reviewed independently commissioned research papers and reference materials by trade associations on service performance, design and branding to establish whether the patterns I observed in my most successful clients were mirrored elsewhere.

I found that all the most successful organisations grow consistently and sustainably because they join all the important elements neatly together. They also appreciate that providing excellent service is an ideal way to differentiate their brands from their competitors.

Then I set myself a challenge – to find an easy way to explain it all that would make a real difference. At a basic level this had to be by linking an organisation's strategy to its clients, to its leader and its people as well as its suppliers. In a simple and straightforward way that everyone could understand and support. At the next level it needed some form of 'glue' that would reinforce the links, making them rigid and stronger together. It seemed especially important for the leaders and senior management to 'get it and use it' because they set a company's whole tone and culture. It had to be practical and accountable and definitely could not include 'management speak' or 'marketing gobbledegook'.

I wanted to share this in a form that you could adapt and use for your own advantage. The reason you have to be able to modify it for yourself, rather than take it without changing anything is because you may be in a business-to-consumer market, a business-to-business one or have to operate in both at the same time and so face different issues. I know it's popular to say there's no difference between B2B and B2C because it's all P2P (people-to-people), but we all know that's not entirely true.

The other reason is that I've never come across two service-based organisations needing the same advice and guidance at precisely the same time. Each is unique, despite any superficial similarities. That's why the whole area of service branding is so challenging, so exciting and also so rewarding. The final reason is that whilst it's easier to identify what needs to change from the outside, for change to last it has to grow from the inside.

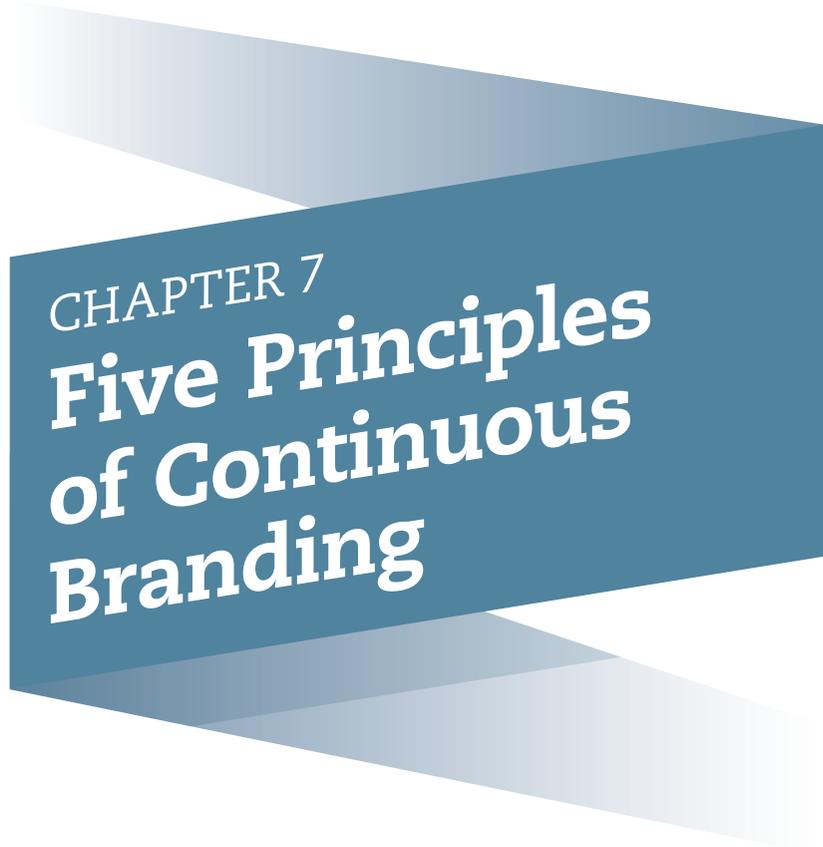
I want to encourage you to look at your own particular situation from a new perspective and then to think differently. Then introduce changes that make a difference over the long term. I'm not suggesting that you must fundamentally change everything you do. Nor is this about costing you a fortune or demanding that you hire expensive people whose skills set you don't

understand. So given everything so far, this led me to develop the strategic tool of 'Continuous Branding' with five principles that I'll share with you in the next chapter.

But first a word of warning. Don't expect Continuous Branding to paper over fundamental problems. It won't make up for fuzzy goals, poor leadership, an uncompetitive, inconsistent or over priced service, a weak structure or demoralised people.

Key points in this chapter

- Successful organisations recognise that branding and design are essential components for growth and innovation regardless of their size. Service still tends to be under valued as a key differentiator by many organisations.
- My most successful clients share a common pattern in terms of their thinking, behaviour and communication that helps explain why the best of them grow consistently whilst others do not. This is mirrored in successful world-class organisations.
- I wanted to develop an easy way to explain how service brands grow by linking an organisation's strategy to its clients, its leader and its people as well as its suppliers – in a way that everyone can understand and support.
- My aim is to share this in a form that you can adapt for your own advantage, first by thinking differently and then looking at your specific circumstances from a new perspective. Then introduce changes that make a fundamental difference over the long term.



CHAPTER 7
**Five Principles
of Continuous
Branding**

Continuous Branding is a strategic tool made up of five principles for those who want to grow their service-based organisations on a consistent and sustainable basis.

Put it at the heart of everything you do when you're tired of sailing into that head wind we've talked about. It's simple, it's practical and it's results-driven.



It's based on nearly thirty years of my experience acting as a branding consultant to a diverse range of service brands from start-ups to multinationals and working with all sorts of service-based organisations. It's also born directly from my drive to help everyone get the very best from their investment in branding.

The five principles are key to your brand's future success because you'll be able to interpret them in your own way to drive your brand forward. There are two very good reasons why I'm not going to tell you precisely how to implement them. The first is that you'll use them in a totally unique way within your organisation and this will depend on whether you are in a business-to-consumer market, business-to-business market or both at the same time. And secondly, the adoption of these principles isn't something you can delegate entirely to anyone else or to a third party to undertake on your behalf. You'll only be able to achieve the results you need if you take complete control yourself. The five principles of Continuous Branding are:

1 THINK LIKE A BRAND OWNER

2 LEAD FROM A POWERFUL MARKET POSITION

3 HAVE A POINT OF VIEW

4 PERSONALISE YOUR BRAND EXPERIENCE

5 INVEST CONTINUOUSLY TO GROW CONSISTENTLY

Continuous Branding is not a discrete, standalone activity that takes place solely in the marketing department or sprinkled superficially all over your organisation on a 'stop start' basis when growth slows.

It should be an integral part of your day-to-day management. Put all the principles of Continuous Branding at the heart of everything you do because it's the only place where you'll fully reap the rewards from your investment in time, energy and money. It will provide you with a framework to manage innovation and service excellence as well as providing a way of driving your brand forward continuously, even in the most challenging conditions.



Principle 1: Think like a Brand Owner

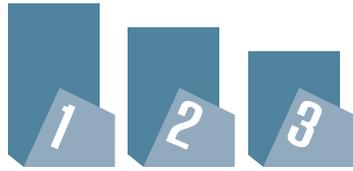
The responsibility for the long term performance and success of your organisation rests with you. So you need to think like a brand owner regardless of your job title, or whether you are the custodian of your brand for only a short time. Everyone else who works with, or for you, should feel motivated to help you achieve your goals.

So what do I mean by thinking like a brand owner? First, it means focusing on what is the right experience for clients and making decisions that are true to your brand. And not being tempted to compromise for a short term gain over your long term good reputation.

Secondly, it means being entrepreneurial, always wanting to improve, spotting opportunities and adapting to meet them.

Thirdly, it means growing your brand consistently, sustainably and responsibly as this is best for everyone involved. And finally but equally importantly, it means inspiring others to help you build your brand and that includes your clients, your suppliers and not least your people. Also, if you make your people feel appreciated and important they'll personify your brand by looking after your clients just as you would yourself.

In order to provide the ideal conditions to grow, sometimes you'll also need to be prepared to protect your brand from anyone else who wants to damage its reputation through their inappropriate behaviour or mischievous comments.



Principle 2: Lead from a Powerful Market Position

Clearly setting out your ambition for your brand for a long term sustainable future is the only place to start. Simply wanting to be ten times your current size is very ambitious, but not clear enough. It doesn't explain why, or how you're going to achieve it. You can't do it on your own without help from your clients and your people, so you need to give them all a big reason why they should support you.

Decide how you're positioning your brand in the most highly desirable place in the minds of your clients so you can achieve what you want. Ideally, it should be in a place where none of your competitors are already positioned. Once your brand has claimed this spot, think how you're going to defend it from others.

Positioning your brand in this way is one of the most powerful things you can do. You'll need professional advisers to help you achieve this and a process which is explained in more detail in chapter 9.



Principle 3: Have a Point of View

People buy from brands that share the same values and have the same point of view as they do. It makes them feel comfortable, understood and respected. They go on to develop deep, enduring and emotional connections with those brands. How can you achieve this between your clients and your brand? The answer is to segment them by their attitude. Seek out clients who share your brand's values and point of view and they will feel a natural synergy with you compared to other brands. A point of view is how a brand views the world, what it thinks is important, what it believes in, what obligations it has and how it behaves. It increases or creates demand for a service. In the business-to-business world it's described as 'thought leadership' which isn't quite such a friendly or engaging term.

Media publishers intelligently segment their markets according to attitude by targeting and then reaching out to certain types of readers by the way they think, their values and their aspirations. Cleverly targeted editorial content promotes them to these readers as independent experts in the chosen subject. This develops strong, yet invisible relationships that build circulation.

In a highly competitive world where there are few real differences between business-to-business brands, one of the best ways to differentiate yours is to develop a point of view of the future that reinforces your brand's position in the minds of your ideal clients. Clearly outline what it is with hard facts and figures to support your thinking. If you can persuade them to look at their problems or issues from this new perspective, you can move forward together and grow consistently. If they're only interested in the cheapest option in the market then you're never going to win.

In consumer markets, brands create and then lead with campaigns that confront a big issue or some form of injustice as a way of expressing their point of view.

EXAMPLE: Celebrity chef, Jamie Oliver (www.jamieoliver.com) combines a successful UK based business empire with a turnover of £200 million (US\$ 300 million) on his cheeky, accessible mass market appeal with a flair for expressing his particular point of view which he describes as taking his public on a journey. You know what's important to Jamie because he not only talks about it, he actually puts his money where his mouth is. He does this by providing opportunities for young unemployed people to become chefs through the apprentice programme at his restaurant, Fifteen. And by starting a campaign to improve school meals and championing much maligned British food. Through The Jamie Oliver Food Foundation, he shares his love of cooking and keeps cooking skills alive. This is a smart move because it provides the Jamie Oliver brand with some space to remind everyone about his true passion.

EXAMPLE: Hubspot (www.hubspot.com) is a business-to-business brand founded in 2006 by Brian Halligan and Dharmesh Shah who created their vision for inbound marketing and a platform to support it. They developed powerful, easy to use, integrated applications so that businesses could attract, engage and delight customers by delivering inbound experiences that were relevant, helpful and personalised.

Their point of view is based on persuading all of us that traditional marketing is no longer relevant, and that inbound marketing or content marketing as some refer to it, is the way forward. They educate us with papers from their marketing library of best practice. Their academy advocates learning by watching training videos, reading user guides and becoming qualified. They even have a free marketing grader that assesses how good our websites are. As they say – 'So you can make it better. Outpace your peers'. Compelling stuff.

They've managed to create a whole community of converts. On digging a bit deeper, you find they don't really think traditional marketing is dead, as they've kept the core principles, adding new ideas to help promote their services. It's clever. After all, content has always been important, it's just brands see it as a more effective engagement tool. The integration of their software and all their services is the key to their success. In doing so, they've helped create a whole new sector called inbound marketing for organisations that want to help their clients find them.

Sharing your point of view provides a continuous way of engaging your clients wherever they are on their journey with your brand. It means that tactical sales campaigns are consigned to the past as you move towards consistent sales growth with only the right type of clients. You'll also find it easier because you'll have the same things in common with them, popping up in the right places at the right time. And creating opportunities to start irresistible conversations that are highly relevant and topical.

Business-to-business brands will find that their negotiations will be less confrontational, less one-sided and more about making the relationship work for both parties – rather than just being hammered down to the lowest price.

According to motivational speaker and author Simon Sinek, people don't buy what you do – they buy why you do it. So you need to uncover why you do what you do and to convey this clearly. Unfortunately, clients tend not to like being overtly sold to – there's a certain in-built resistance to sales people where the barriers automatically rise when being pressurised in any way. Explaining why you do what you do can be achieved through engaging brand storytelling – everyone loves a good story especially ones about ordinary people. The greater the adversity overcome, the harder the stories work – by resonating deep within our souls. They're also

far more interesting and engaging than sanitised press releases crafted by spin doctors writing for many different stakeholders all at the same time.

People are inspired more by an ordinary person creating an extraordinary experience than listening to a 'commitment to service excellence' statement proclaimed by the Chief Executive Officer of a faceless corporate entity. They'll also find it easier to remember and to tell others.

We relate to stories in ways that no bland advertising campaign or super slick sales person can replicate. Perhaps it goes back to our childhood when we learnt this way? We find them easy to understand, interpret and buy in to. They cut right through all the clutter in a complicated world – and they star your people helping your clients in extraordinary ways, and explaining in an engaging way, why you do what you do. Dig deep and you'll probably find plenty of such stories – so use them in different situations. They work well when told at the right time and in the right place. A spin off of this is that by searching out and recognising your people in this way as an integral part of your brand ethos, you will inspire others to raise their own performances too. In turn, this creates more to talk about and more people to congratulate. I find that most brand owners overlook the fact that their own people are creating brilliant new stories every day – and not recognising that these are far more believable than all the marketing hype.

The people featured in them need to be recognised and celebrated and the very best examples of them published – because there are not enough good service stories out there. They're far outnumbered by the thousands of bad experiences that seem to pop out of the woodwork all too easily. Every one of us has experience of those!

On top of this, there are a myriad of different ways to communicate with people compared to when I first started work. This means there are a lot more opportunities to get your message across. Although, I do find it a little ironic that it seems harder now, or sometimes virtually impossible, to get a response from anyone!

When I first started my career, I either wrote a letter or picked up the 'phone to a prospective client. If they were at their desk when I rang, they answered it because they didn't know whether it was their boss, colleague or a loved one calling them. Or me, for that matter! If they weren't actually there, it rang and rang. If they were in a meeting, in their car or travelling, I had to wait until they got back to their desk. No caller ID or voicemail to protect them either. Now all calls are screened they don't pick up, and voicemail kicks in to take my messages.

They also receive hundreds of emails a day that are not opened because they're just far too busy dealing with more urgent things. Add Skype, iChat and social media into the mix and it's all mind-blowing to a fifty-something like me! People don't respond unless you have something very relevant and topical to talk about. If you can't reach them when you want to, help them reach you when they want to.

To achieve this, you'll need that appealing or thought provoking point of view and an interesting and engaging way to trigger that first conversation. You'll also need ways to continue the dialogue through an exchange of ideas and experiences that you've been on together.



Principle 4: Personalise your Brand Experience

We all know what ‘building rapport’ means. It’s an essential step in developing a relationship with somebody. But have you ever thought how to make it an absolutely fundamental and integral part of what your service brand does in building all those valuable relationships? You can’t afford to leave anything to chance so you need to decide where and when the moments for building rapport will take place by inserting them into every stage of the brand experience. From the first moment that your brand is discovered, all the way through to enjoying a shared experience.

Make sure you don’t have any guidelines or procedures in place that will hinder your people from doing what you now want them to do – or you’ll be telling them to achieve one thing and measuring and rewarding their behaviour to do another. This will be confusing for them, irritating for your clients and counter productive for your brand. This next example is far more common than many would like to admit.

EXAMPLE: I once commented on the poor display of in-store communications materials to a client of mine who worked in the retailer’s marketing department. I was told it was difficult to get right because the people in the stores were measured in all sorts of ways including how tidy the stock room was. This is obviously very important if you run a shop, but they weren’t measured on whether they displayed the posters, leaflets and tickets correctly on the shop floor. The general running of the store was being prioritised and addressed, but not the customer experience and ensuing sales.

So, make sure that you’re not making it harder than it needs to be for your people to provide your clients with the brand experience you’ve defined. How do you start to build the brand experience then? You need to sit down with a multi-disciplined team of internal people and specialists, as well as external partners, who can share their objective and expert views with you. You’ll have to pick people who can put aside preconceptions and place themselves in your clients’ shoes. This is a journey that you’ll all go on together with your brand.

Define all the touch points, or as I prefer to call them – ‘rapport building opportunities’. I’m not keen on the phrase, touch point, because these moments in time are highly important. Sometimes they’re fleeting and yet each must be recognised and incorporated into helping your people and your brand to build rapport with your clients.

These moments must also be a high quality experience or they just won't make an impression. They definitely won't be memorable either, and you'll fail to build any rapport whatsoever.

EXAMPLE: The receptionists in restaurants owned and operated by Jason Atherton's The Social Company (www.thesocialcompany.co.uk) never walk in front of guests when guiding them to their tables, but at their side. In doing this, they create the opportunity to chat and pick up little bits of knowledge about the reason for the visit. These snippets are passed on to the maitre d' who is then enabled to make their experience a little extra special. They do this because they're really passionate about what they do – the food, the service and value for money – however, they recognise the guest experience is the over riding and most crucial factor when building loyalty.

As you can see from this example there are all sorts of (small, inexpensive) ways to personalise your brand experience if you set your mind to it. However, if your service is for other organisations or businesses as opposed to consumers, there will be different issues to consider. For instance, there is usually more than one person on the decision making team and contract negotiations can take weeks or months to complete. If you need to submit tenders to win new business, then establish what information, help or support the decision making team needs to select your bid to move forward.

Collect this information or intelligence and then develop different ways they can access or experience it. To do this, you need to work out what they're thinking at each stage in their buying journey, the questions they have, how they feel and where they're located. Are they in one of your offices, restaurants or somewhere else that's totally neutral? You'll need to learn what's making them anxious and to understand the issues they're trying to resolve. This way you'll provide them with the information they need and not the information you think they need. Ask yourself, how do you want them to feel at the end of each rapport building opportunity? At this point, don't forget to also provide them with a clear step for moving forward together with you.

As you know, every little detail builds or breaks the brand experience. For example, environments like your store, office or exhibition stand and communications materials like brochures all play their part. Once you've decided what you're going to do you need to document everything, and then plan how you're going to communicate this all to the people who need to know. They need to be clear about what to do to support you. Don't forget to build in ways that will encourage them to continuously improve the way they do this. Never stand still – because to stand still is to go backwards.

If you're always searching for deeper ways to engage your clients then sooner or later you will move towards personalisation of their experience of your brand. Around your organisation you already have all the experts and the answers that your existing and prospective clients will ever need to help them achieve their goals. Given the right guidance and support, your people have the ability to make your clients' lives easier, make them feel good about themselves, look good in their own organisations and in turn to help their brand be more successful. In return, they'll reward you with larger and longer contracts which all has to be good for your continuous growth.

Finding an accessible way to bring all these things together will be a huge asset. It might be a web-based tool or an app that's useful, helpful and relevant. If you can share information, data or opinions that provide valuable and timely insights then this could potentially disrupt whole markets by excluding competitors from the conversation altogether.

Having inserted all the rapport building opportunities into your brand experience you can review it on an annual or six monthly basis depending on your own circumstances. And also whenever you need to create a new or different brand experience. How do you then make sure this experience is consistent day in day out? You'll need to record it in such a way that all your people understand what is expected of them. You can do this in the way that your people find the most

engaging and memorable. An employee engagement programme like this could be based on using illustrations, infographics, cartoons, animations or film. The possibilities are endless for communicating how to personify your brand. To perform consistently, they'll want to know how to appear, behave and communicate and how they'll be measured, recognised and rewarded for doing a fantastic job. The format and content will depend entirely on the type, complexity and location of service and the number of people involved. Ensure that it's easy to access whenever and wherever it's needed otherwise it will fail to be effective.

As part of all of this take moments to celebrate successes together. I don't mean throwing wild parties every week. What I mean is taking a few moments to highlight something that has gone particularly well, to congratulate all those involved and to provide positive feedback. It's an easy step to forget when you're so busy or because you're firefighting.

You need to share all your research findings and performance data at regular review meetings to evaluate whether you're on course to achieve what you want. I'm not suggesting loads of different metrics. Just a few key ones that will enable you to accurately measure how much progress you're making. Share the good news and the bad. The purpose of this is not to blame anyone in particular, but to share things when they don't go to plan so everyone can work together on making improvements and be continuously moving

forward. They all need to know what is going on because engaged employees are more productive, providing your clients and each other with excellent service. They'll understand how their actions have an impact on the performance of your brand, even if they work behind the scenes with no direct client interaction. One of the ways you can achieve this is by using a social networking website exclusively for your people, but accessed from whatever device they prefer to use. They'll quickly learn that this is the fastest and most reliable way of finding out everything that will help them be the best they can. This type of system is ideal if you have multiple locations, people working from home or on the move as it's a great way of keeping everyone together culturally.

Performance should be measured on a regular basis to highlight any issues and enable you to make improvements quickly – and ensure your brand gets better continuously. Meeting regularly to make improvements is great, but you can't beat all working closely together on a continuous basis if you can re-arrange your work space to do so (not so easy in a big multinational, I know). This makes it easier to communicate with each other and to make things happen. Fast. How you measure your own progress will depend on what your ambition is for your service brand and how you define success. So measure where you are now regularly so you know when you've reached your goals.



Principle 5: Invest Continuously to Grow Consistently

I'm often asked what sort of investment in time and money should be committed in order to grow. There's no simple answer and it all depends on the unique circumstances of your brand and what precise stage of development it's at. Consider investing anywhere up to 3% of your revenue per annum on Continuous Branding. However, it isn't so much the actual amount you spend that's important, but rather it's about applying it consistently over a continuous period of time that will make the difference. The percentage will depend on the unique circumstances of your brand.

Brands that challenge market leaders tend to spend more on branding than their peers because they're trying to become a dominant player and command higher prices. Having achieved it, this allows them to invest in research, training and IT infrastructure which in turn all help to keep them ahead.

Just like every home owner, every brand owner wants to increase the value of their asset over the long term. A home owner continuously invests money in building maintenance, decoration and gardening to keep their property looking good and the weather out. If they had to sell quickly, they wouldn't need to spend a fortune putting everything right or accept a lower offer.

The same goes for your service brand. If you continuously invest in it then you'll maximise its value over the long term. The more valuable your brand, the easier it is to attract the best talent and suppliers and you'll also be in a stronger position with your clients.

Continuous Branding enables you to decide whether to design new services, diversify, divest, spin-off, merge or sell up or start again. Whatever challenges you face it's good to continually invest in your brand so that you're in the best shape to take on whatever is thrown at you. It's so much easier to do this continuously than have to take a deep breath and make a big investment in re-branding every few years with all of the uncertainty and disruption it causes.

No matter how good the quality of your service is right now, you need to improve it on a continuous basis. So how can this be done? This is a subject for a whole book in its own right and I'm not proposing to cover it here. It depends on your particular situation – it could be you only need to improve certain aspects of it, or

re-design your existing ones or perhaps add completely new services. Ask yourself what is happening in your market? Measure where you are now and assess any change in perception as you move forward.

Maintaining a high quality of service is only achievable with high quality people, but it's unrealistic to be able to keep a great team together for years. The critical DNA will be lost unless successive generations inherit the genes by learning about your brand and how to personify it. In the dance world, principal dancers of the previous generation will often run master classes to coach the next generation on the finer points of the major roles. In the world of branding, passing on the essential DNA can be achieved through story telling and sharing team building experiences with all of your people, branding experts and designers.

So if you're still not convinced by all of this, what happens if you decide not to adopt the principles of Continuous Branding? You may not notice anything in the short term but quite soon it'll feel like that head wind is blowing stronger and stronger. Everything just takes more effort. You may also find that small, cheeky competitors start to steal your market share. At first, only tiny bits at a time. You'll easily dismiss this to begin with, but it will gather pace. You may even find that some of your best people leave, disillusioned with how slowly you're developing and either join another organisation or start up on their own. Some of your

clients will go elsewhere, your brand won't grow as strongly as you'd like and your shareholders will be disappointed.

However, if you put the principles of Continuous Branding at the centre of everything you do then your brand will begin to feel more agile, nimble and responsive. It'll become more dynamic, quicker and adaptable. You'll be communicating with your people better and as a result they'll be motivated and fully engaged. This in turn enables them to serve your clients by working together and performing at their very best. They'll fully appreciate how their efforts affect your brand and their own personal development. One thing is for certain, by achieving all this you'll be building the long term value of your brand – just in case you ever want to prepare it for a sale or merger.

In the next chapter I'll share with you how I've helped Greg Mace, Managing Director of Rapport Guest Services to build his brand and how he uses Continuous Branding to consistently grow his company by motivating his people to personify his brand based on excellent, award winning service.

Key points in this chapter

- Continuous Branding is made up of five principles and is for anyone running or marketing a service-based organisation and building their brand through their people.
- Use Continuous Branding strategically, by putting the principles at the heart of everything you do for greater brand performance and success with more consistent and sustainable growth.
- Motivating your people to personify your brand is both challenging and rewarding and Continuous Branding can help you with it.



CHAPTER 8: Case Study
Building Rapport
Guest Services

The market for front of house services in the corporate world has developed significantly in recent years and is far more crowded with the entry of new and increasingly smarter and more sophisticated competitors.

As a result organisations in the City of London like banks, professional services and media companies now enjoy a far greater choice of service providers.

When I last counted there were seven major competitors and six minor ones. This is the story of how a new and highly successful guest services brand was built and is continuing to grow.

Greg Mace was originally appointed Managing Director of RA Business Services, providing reception management services alongside Restaurant Associates, the caterer and restaurant operator. Both were part of Compass Group UK & Ireland, the market leading international foodservice and support services company. Compass Group's strategy was to provide a wider range of support services to clients and within six months Greg concluded that RA Business Services needed a new brand name and identity with a clear, compelling proposition that would help him to grow the business. Our research revealed that the new brand should provide a highly personal experience based on anticipating the individual needs of every guest. From this insight, a brand story was developed that would set the strategic context, help to define the brand personality and set the framework for selecting a new name.

If you've ever met or worked with Greg, you'll know that he is entrepreneurial as well as a perfectionist and doesn't believe in doing anything unless you put absolutely everything into it. And I mean everything. Your heart and soul. As an example, his father, told me a story about him as a boy, spending summer holidays at the family home on Bryher, a small island of eighty people in The Isles of Scilly, 28 miles (45 km) off the coast of Cornwall, England. Apparently, Greg was always trying to think of ways to make a little extra pocket money. Buying a metal detector one year he would

scan the whole beach outside his parents' house for coins dropped by holiday makers. He quickly noticed that they preferred to put their towels on clear parts of the beach without seaweed or driftwood. So he started to rake the beach in small areas to encourage them to sit there, which meant that he had less beach to scan and a better return on his time. When I mentioned this to Greg, he told me that the real turning point in this enterprise came when £1 coins were introduced as legal tender, because they were much heavier than other coins and were sandy in colour. So when they fell out of pockets they sank below the surface instead of resting on top. He recounted that he detected more £1 coins than any other types.

Back in London, Creative Director, Mark Dresh and I left our initial briefing meeting with Greg, thinking that it was going to be tough to create a new name and brand identity that would live up to his high expectations. So we headed straight off for a cup of tea at the Four Seasons Hotel on London's Park Lane. As we approached the hotel entrance, there were a couple of people washing a car. They both smiled at us, before one stopped what he was doing and opened the main door for us. We walked in towards the reception desk, which had a queue of people in front of it. One of the receptionists stood up and walked around the desk to greet us. She could see that we didn't have any heavy bags so clearly knew that we weren't checking in.

I asked where we could have a drink and she led us through two sets of doors, where we were met by a very smart young man. She introduced us to him by briefly explaining what we wanted to do. He took over and led us to a table by the window in the restaurant having asked us where we would prefer to sit. At the bar or at a table? Despite being engaged by three different people, the whole experience was seamless and totally effortless on our part. We were both made to feel totally relaxed and welcome as we were guided to our destination. We didn't have to repeat ourselves in any way to find just what we wanted. Sitting down, we both agreed that this was precisely the type of service that Greg was re-creating every day in the receptions of major financial services clients in the City of London and it was our job to propose a new name and brand identity for his organisation.

Whilst having our tea and less than an hour after our meeting with Greg, we realised that the new brand, whatever we were going to call it, needed to sum up everything in the following sentence:

“To create a very personal, intuitive service, anticipating needs, saving valuable time and making guests feel welcome and relaxed”.

This value proposition provided a clear articulation of what it would feel like to experience the service and the benefits of buying it. The next week we visited some of Greg's existing clients and reviewed all of the communications materials before concluding that there was a real opportunity to position the brand in a unique and highly defensible way. One that would be impossible for competitors to copy if it was defined clearly and claimed with confidence and conviction. All the key messages to be communicated to clients were also developed and established at the same time.

We brainstormed over five hundred possible names; five were shortlisted and scored against a set of criteria before the name Rapport was selected. This name represented the brand story the best and worked on two levels. The name Rapport sums up the desire to focus on the need of each individual guest and the first two letters, 'RA' tie it into sister company, Restaurant Associates which was commonly abbreviated to RA. We presented our research findings along with the shortlisted names, possible strap lines and design concepts.

Greg said: “When I first saw the name, Rapport, I thought it was fantastic! And I love it as much now as I did when I first saw it however this was just the start of our branding journey”. He went on to explain that, “We had also developed a distinctive logo, represented by the word Rapport and a two-way ‘speech bubble’ or marque, as we call it. We think of this as being shorthand for our Rapport (www.rapportservice.com) brand. In a similar way that Nike have their famous swoosh and I was particularly keen on this because I could see the potential for it’s use in the future development of the brand”.

“The logo and marque are highly flexible and they can be adapted for creating stories and engaging with people. For example, the marque was made into lapel pins and cuff links which are presented to winners of Service Excellence Awards. They’re prized because they mean so much, even though they’re so little. That’s the real power of branding”.

A design for a very simple and easy to navigate website, taking visitors on a carefully orchestrated journey to greater enlightenment of the brand was proposed by the design agency. Then they recommended creating a 60 second movie with a specially commissioned unique sound track for the website. This movie was designed to reflect the guests’ seamless experience and further reinforced the brand’s positioning.

Rapport logo, strap line and marque



WELCOME ENGAGE IMPRESS



Establishing the tone of voice for the brand was the biggest challenge because it had to appeal to corporate clients that tend to be reassured by business partners of a substantial size and geographical reach. Yet, yearn for the quality of personal service found in smaller, more agile organisations. It also had to convey the new positioning based on anticipating the needs of each individual guest.

I contributed to the early development of the brand's vision, mission and values. These guiding principles helped ensure that the people who work for the company (or Rapport Ambassadors as they're called) provide the guest experience that perfectly matches the brand promise. They do this by personifying the brand just as Greg envisioned. The internal launch of the new brand took place to 200 people at a central London hotel, one month before the official launch.

Having worked with many clients in different organisations there are few that I'd call exceptional. However, Greg Mace is one. Within a very short time Rapport has become the leading guest services company in it's market. This is largely down to Greg, his background in five-star hotels along with his vision and determination to provide corporate clients with exceptional front of house services. He thinks and behaves like a brand owner by combining an entrepreneurial spirit and an unswerving commitment to service excellence, that is rarely found, and which continually drives the organisation forward.

Branding, design and marketing communications have played an integral part in helping Rapport to grow. Market positioning has been very powerful and has created the space for growth of the service brand. It's a mixture of strategy, science and art that has resulted in a brand that resonates well with the right type of clients. They all buy into Rapport's point of view about the way that guests should be looked after, because it's precisely the way they'd like to be looked after themselves.

But the real growth has been achieved by the fantastic team of Rapport Ambassadors. Each is motivated and then supported to provide their clients and guests with outstanding service. Recognition and rewards come in a variety of different ways, from the popular and highly regarded annual Service Excellence Awards, to visits to leading five-star hotels, one-to-one meetings with Greg, numerous social get togethers and fundraising events. Year on year growth has been achieved by bringing every one of these individual components together and continually monitoring and maintaining them.

Greg adds, "Within a relatively short space of time, Rapport has become highly recognised and admired in the market and firmly established itself within the Compass Group UK & Ireland family. It's amazing what has been achieved by bringing the brand to life in so many different ways. One of my greatest pleasures is seeing the way our clients and our Rapport Ambassadors have taken it to their hearts".

But that's not all, Rapport has won Best Front of House Team two years in a row at the Catey Awards, a significant achievement as these are the most prestigious hospitality awards considered equivalent of the 'Oscars' in the film industry. Rapport was ranked number 21 in the Caterer's Magazine Top 30 Best Places to Work in Hospitality and accredited with one star status from Best Companies, the organisation behind the Sunday Times Top 100 Companies to Work For. The ratings system is similar to the Michelin Guide where the best restaurants in the world are awarded one, two or three stars.



The financial results have been impressive too. In the first full financial year following the launch Rapport grew by 20% and in the second by 35%”.

Continual improvement is actively encouraged and supported through the use of an internal engagement portal called myRapport. It allows Rapport Ambassadors to stay in touch with each other despite working in different locations, to share news and best practices which helps everyone to continually provide the best possible service. A monthly e-newsletter is sent to clients and Rapport Ambassadors and features a video intro from Greg himself. There is an invisible but very powerful 'cultural glue' that binds them all to each other and their clients. It's based on brilliant internal communications that engage, challenge and motivate everyone to be the best they can be.

It's inspiring to see how Rapport Ambassadors now personify the brand every day in such amazing ways. Here are three examples.

1. *Just after 11am at the Canary Wharf offices of a Rapport client, a man was late for his important meeting. Rushing up to a Rapport Ambassador at the reception desk he realised that his phone was on the back seat of the taxi pulling away outside. Still distracted by his missing phone he was shown to his meeting room. By the time he'd finished, the Rapport Ambassador had contacted the taxi company, traced the cab and arranged for the driver to return the phone.*

2. *An American guest on her first trip to London mistakenly arrived at the wrong office and was advised by a Rapport Ambassador that her meeting was about to begin on the other side of town. Feeling anxious, the guest wanted to take a cab but was told that at that time of day the underground was the only way to get there in time. Panic. She had never used the underground before, didn't know where the station was, what ticket to buy or where to buy it. Without hesitation, the Rapport Ambassador walked her to the station, handing over her personal Oyster card so that the guest didn't have to worry about payment, indicated which station to get off at and directions to the correct office.*

3. *A Rapport Ambassador was told that a man had suffered a suspected cardiac arrest and was bleeding. An ambulance had already been called, he phoned reception and security to ensure no delays for the paramedics to find him. As a trained first aider he went to help and a colleague was already performing CPR. He checked for breathing. Nothing. Concluding that because of the size of the man's frame the pressure was not enough, he took over CPR until the paramedics arrived. After bringing the man out of an induced coma, the hospital said that this quick action gave the patient the chance he needed.*

These are examples of exceptional service. But they go on every day because Rapport Ambassadors are empowered to take control of situations like these. Occasions like this make Rapport's clients look really great in front of their own clients and all the extra effort really pays off. Not just for the clients, guests and stakeholders of Rapport but also for the Rapport Ambassadors themselves as new business wins have created exciting career opportunities.

The reason why market leaders lead is because they keep doing new things before anyone else does. As an example, Rapport, in collaboration with ComXo (www.ComXo.co.uk), a switchboard support specialist, created an 'industry first' by celebrating the professional role of their telephone operators. Between the two organisations, they created the first National Telephonists' Day on 10 March – the anniversary of Alexander Graham Bell making the world's first ever telephone call. Many high profile companies supported the event by getting involved by taking part in the light hearted competitions, uploading pictures and funny audio stories to a dedicated website for the day. The event was an outstanding success, was picked up by the national press and is set to be repeated annually.

National Telephonists' Day logo



Rapport continues to grow in two ways. Firstly, by winning and developing new contracts and secondly by creating additional services so there is always something new and exciting to talk about. A very useful and helpful concierge service has just been added for clients who want tickets for prestigious events or seats at exclusive restaurants. Called www.cityconciiergebyrapport.com it also features hospitality tickets for major sporting and cultural events by Keith Prowse, which is also part of Compass Group.

Inspired by what can be achieved? Do you have ambitious plans for your organisation? Then you're in the right place to start your branding journey. In the next chapter I'll explain the stages and outline when and why you should start, what to start with and when you can expect results. I'll also share my top ten tips to help you prepare for your journey. Let's get going.

Key points in this chapter

- Greg understands the power of Continuous Branding by linking it to his strategy and his people and putting the five principles at the heart of everything he does.
- **Principle 1:** Greg thinks like a brand owner by continually building the value of Rapport through excellent service and growing the company at the same time. Clients want to appoint Rapport because they're the best in the market and to experience their unique brand of hospitality.
- **Principle 2:** Greg leads from a powerful market position because he understands that his clients crave an intuitive service, one that anticipates needs, that saves time and makes their guests feel welcome and relaxed. This is conveyed through the Rapport website, driving home its market position and continually reinforcing it with 'industry firsts' like National Telephonists' Day to celebrate the role of professional telephone operators.

- **Principle 3:** Greg and Rapport have an engaging point of view. With his five-star hotel experience, he has a crystal clear idea of how clients and their guests should be looked after. Although, his real gift is his ability to inspire his people to personify the Rapport brand by thinking and behaving like him. He is always telling stories about his wonderful Rapport Ambassadors and the annual Service Excellence Awards are recognition, celebration and reward for the most outstanding examples of service.
- **Principle 4:** Greg personalises the Rapport brand experience for clients and guests. This makes them feel important, valued and good about themselves. It comes from empowering his Rapport Ambassadors to take control of situations that are 'out of the ordinary' and trusting them to do the right thing. This personalisation is powerful and extremely difficult for competitors to replicate.
- **Principle 5:** Greg invests continuously to grow consistently. He knows that the minute he stops investing will be the minute Rapport stops growing. This is what drives him on to win new contracts and prestigious awards for service and excellence in workplace engagement whilst still growing the Rapport brand at more than 20% per annum.

CHAPTER 9

**Your Branding
Journey Begins
Here**

When I bought my first home, nobody educated me about the whole process. I had to work it out for myself; negotiating with the estate agent, dealing with the bank, chasing the solicitor, trusting the surveyor to check it was a sound investment and finally organising the removal guys to shift everything and sorting out the utilities.

Your branding journey is based on a proven process, broken down into stages. I'll run you through when and why you should start your journey, what you should start with and when you can expect to see results.

I'll also share my top ten tips to help prepare beforehand and then show you what to do for each stage of your branding journey.

Nobody seems to explain what the stages of branding are because it demands so many different skill sets to complete it successfully. It can also be confusing if you listen to some practitioners who like to make it appear more complicated. It isn't, and that's another reason why I developed the five simple principles of Continuous Branding to prove it. You can apply these to your organisation and they'll help you achieve the results your ambition deserves.

Why should you start your journey here? There will be many different reasons. For instance, it could be you're finding it hard to grow because of changes in your market caused by increasing competition or social shifts, by peaks and troughs in the economy, the introduction of new legislation or the arrival of the latest disruptive technologies. Perhaps, having found it hard going for a while, things have reached a critical point and you need to take more definite action now.

What are you actually starting with? You may have a newly formed service, a long established and trusted service brand in the market or simply a concept in your head or jotted down somewhere.

Where should you start your journey from? That doesn't matter! It's where you want to go that's important.

When do you expect to see results? I'll answer this because I know it'll be on your mind and I'm always asked it. This depends on your ambition, your specific objectives, the quality of your people, how fast your organisation can make decisions and change things, how faithfully you follow the process and finally on having a long term partnership with the right agency. With all these factors in place, a realistic expectation would be to see initial results in 18 months. Maybe sooner. But it really all depends on your particular circumstances.

How big will the impact be? Again, this will depend on your unique set of circumstances, how achievable your objectives are, plus how big you expect the impact to be. Some examples include changes in your market share, revenue, margin, employee engagement, net promoter score, reputation and employee engagement. There are many more but you get the idea.

So, are you ready to get started? Here my top ten tips to get you ready.

1. Select the right branding consultant or agency partner because you're going to need specialist expertise to guide you on your journey. Make sure they have the relevant skills and experience. Do they have a tried and tested creative process?

Do you think they have the ability to challenge you, guide you and listen to you when needed? Are they able to work collaboratively with you? You'll achieve a better, more robust result with this type of relationship because it will complement the skills and experience of the individuals you've enlisted internally. This is one of the biggest decisions you'll make because the difference in the results you can expect from working with the best people – and the rest – could be the difference between success and failure.

2. Write a clear brief. Provide all the relevant background information to your market, competitors (including any research findings), the project objectives, an indication of budget, any constraints, the timeframe, the approval process and when a response is required.
3. Set your target for success. What are the deliverables? This should correspond with what you need the project to do for your organisation. How are you going to measure whether you've been successful? You can use numbers, or specific qualitative targets or goals. Share these with your agency so they're clear about what the objectives are, and they'll rise to the challenge with their proposed creative solution, giving you something solid to judge it against.

4. Engage your decision makers and key people throughout the entire process. This is especially important when agreeing the positioning for your brand. If everyone is not in agreement with the new proposed position, you'll never agree on the creative solution to achieve it. You'll also need their support and a united front when you introduce your brand to others in your organisation. I appreciate that it isn't possible to include everybody all of the time and you'll have to decide when and how to involve them.
5. Make sure everyone is 'on board' at the right time in your timeframe. The people in your organisation can make or break your brand so this is an important point. You need to let them know precisely how to personify your brand and any other ways you expect them to help you.
6. Organise a launch event to celebrate and communicate your new or refreshed brand. Set a date and stick to it. The event doesn't need to be large but do organise a venue that reflects your brand's personality – and send out invitations. Having a date 'set in stone' helps focus minds on a point in time and reduces procrastination and indecision.

7. Do what you say you're going to – when you say you're going to do it. It can be difficult to get everyone on board, to get decisions and feedback on time and to gain consensus, especially with a large group of people. But it's essential to keep the process on schedule as procrastination can seriously disrupt the whole process. Make sure you factor in reasonable time for discussion and debate as this will give you a chance to iron out any differences in the time available.
8. Be clear, prompt and honest with feedback to your agency partner. Everyone in the team needs to be clear on what they're doing, when they need to do it and to provide prompt feedback within the agreed timeframe. Otherwise you'll be at risk of going round in ever decreasing circles which burns up time and money very quickly.
9. Be brave to be different. The Bible says that the meek shall inherit the earth, but in my experience meek brands are never successful. You have to be brave to be different – to stand out and be noticed. When I say brave, I don't mean reckless. If you work in a large organisation you may be thinking this is easier said than done. Well it is – but it shouldn't stop you doing it. Too many organisations find it easier and safer to blend in with their competitors because they feel clients are all looking for the same sort of service provider. This is a flawed strategy because their clients will find it difficult to pick them out. Differentiation is what they need.

10. Keep your brand moving forward on a continuous basis after the launch. Remember the launch date is a significant milestone on your journey, not the end of the branding process. It's tempting to launch, then sit back and congratulate yourself, but this is dangerous territory. Once you've introduced your brand to your own people and clients you need to develop and commit to a plan that keeps your brand in front of them on a continuous basis.

Below is a list of stages for your branding journey. You may not need to undertake all of them in this particular order, and some can be undertaken concurrently.

- 1. Gain Insights**
- 2. Strategy and Positioning your Brand**
- 3. Developing your Brand Story and Point of View**
- 4. Naming your Brand**
- 5. Creating your Brand Identity and the Experience**
- 6. Marketing Communications**
- 7. Engaging your People**
- 8. Helping Everyone Find your Brand**
- 9. Adopting Continuous Branding**

Stage 1 of your branding journey

GAIN INSIGHTS

Most service brands are far too inward looking, spending more time looking and talking about themselves than looking outwards at the wider world of their clients and competitors. They need to be far more extrovert and more engaging. Asking lots of deep, searching questions of your clients is the only way to gain valuable insights and to understand the issues that your brand faces.

Always keep an open mind whilst looking outside of your organisation – because you might be surprised by what you find. Use the insights you've gleaned to inform your company's internal decision-making. You must establish what's important to your clients because they may value things you haven't thought of – or even think of as important. Your communications must also be reviewed to evaluate what you're saying and how you're saying it in the light of your findings and insights.

Turning to your competitors, split them into two key groups; those that are highly visible on-line and those you come up against in tenders or as incumbents in the real world (or off-line). You're probably thinking that all organisations are visible on-line. Well they probably are to some degree, it just depends on how hard you look.

However, they're effectively invisible unless they pop up on the first two or three pages of internet searches. Your on-line competitors will be the ones that have the better optimised landing pages on their websites for key phrases that your clients are most likely to be searching for. They'll also probably have a far better presence on social media by being more active and engaging on applications such as Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram and Pinterest. Here, they'll be sharing their point of view and expressing their brand values through their personality in a lot more interesting and thoughtful ways than on their main website. This provides clients with alternative ways to find them whilst they're busy looking for answers to their most important questions, or shortlisting potential service providers.

Search engines will rank their web pages higher because the content is more recent and relevant to the searches being carried out. What does this mean for your brand? You need to make sure you have landing pages that are well optimised to rank as high as possible, and give your clients the opportunity to click through to the right pages to find you.

Using search engines also makes it possible for you to look for organisations that are already providing clients with useful, helpful and relevant information or content. For example, magazines or trade associations are information-rich sources. You can assess where your clients are spending their time on-line and it also enables you to find out what your competitors are talking about and how well they're doing it. This type of intelligence will help you decide what your point of view should be.

You can also analyse your competitors' Twitter followers to assess what sort of people they are attracting and compare them to your own follower profile. The web is a fantastic source and you'll be able to amass considerable information about all your competitors.

Another avenue for your research should be to investigate small, up and coming organisations who are potential competitors. They are often more in tune with what's going on in your market than some of the larger players that you come up against. By looking at them, you'll see how small, flexible and flourishing organisations are approaching your market and positioning themselves. This may provide you with some valuable clues.

It's often very useful to commission independent research to fill any gaps in your information and market intelligence. This will help you build an accurate picture of where you are now.

It's always worth talking to a selection of your existing clients, and other influencers like bloggers and independent consultants to uncover what's important to them, and to ask what makes you uniquely different. Your clients are ideally placed for this because they can pinpoint precisely why they like working with you. They'll have an objectivity and clarity that's hard to beat. You are simply too close to your own brand. They see it from an outsider's perspective, they know your brand well and may have bought from a competitor in the past as comparison. They'll have a unique view. You can also find out what the issues and problems are that your existing and prospective clients face every day, so that your brand can maintain its usefulness, helpfulness and relevance to them.

Once you feel you have all the information you can find from outside of your organisation it's time to establish what your aspirations are for your brand. Gather the views of the key people in your organisation and other trusted advisers. Doing this will help define where you'd like to be in the future, and work out how you'll know when you reach your goals. It also helps you uncover deep brand insights and develop your positioning strategy and brand story.

Stage 2 of your branding journey

STRATEGY AND POSITIONING YOUR BRAND

Perfectly positioning your brand in the minds of your clients is the most powerful thing you can do. It'll make your life easier and you'll be able to grow your brand more consistently. It provides the tail wind that you've been searching for. When it's based on a clear brand strategy your clients will find it easier to choose your brand and, at the same time, it'll make life more difficult for your competitors.

The best branding agencies have developed their creative process to tap into your people's thinking, your clients' behaviour and your market's expectations. They use it to isolate the genetic code of your organisation, communicate its essence and define a beautiful relationship for your clients and your brand. This part of the branding process is not easy and there are always a few twists and turns along the way, but it's worth pushing on hard because it will help you and your people to understand what makes your brand really different. And that's something vital for future success and consistent growth.

How you assimilate and digest all the information in this process will be down to the way it's gathered and shared with you, and the particular journey of discovery you go on with your people. Providing that you approach it with an open mind, no preconceptions and a willingness to work collaboratively, you'll be able to develop your brand strategy.

First share your insights and, as a team, assess which brand values are the most appealing to the right type of clients. Then visually map out your brand's existing position in relation to your direct competitors using these values. This can be done on a simple XY grid comprising the two most important brand values you've identified.

This exercise will help you understand the relative positions of these competitors to your brand right now. As you know, markets never stand still so an ideal position last year may not be right this year. Viewing and then segmenting your market in different ways will reveal new groupings of existing, new and more appealing brand values, that were not evident before. The ideal spot for your brand going forward will be in the most advantageous position when mapped out with competitors – against the same two most appealing brand values. This is going to be different for every brand and will depend on your market and your particular situation, but will ideally be in a space that is clear of competitors. It takes skill to achieve that 'ideal' spot; your knowledge and experience will be useful in helping you decide where your brand should be positioned.

The result of this exercise will enable you to find a unique position that didn't necessarily exist before, but will from now on. Or perhaps it did exist before and is now visible because you've analysed and segmented your market in a different way. If you have the skills and experience in-house you can do all this yourself, but I find that most of my clients are too close to their brands to do this objectively themselves. Some of them have been through this process once, or even twice before, and yet still find it a difficult journey to navigate without objective, third party help.

Positioning is very important. If you don't do anything about your positioning, your competitors will – and they'll identify and then occupy the ideal spot you want to claim for your brand. That inevitably means you get relegated to a less advantageous position.

Discussion and debate will be brought to life if your agency partner develops two or three alternative positioning concepts that are distinctive and highly differentiated from each other. Each can be demonstrated as a collection of visuals and words that sum up each positioning concept. These can help you establish which of them would resonate best with only the right type of clients.

The secret is having identified earlier which brand values are the most appealing to the right type of clients. And these need to be expressed in a convincing and compelling way in each of the positioning concepts. The concept that achieves this task in the simplest way will be the one you should choose. It's the one that will make it easier for your clients to choose your brand, enabling it to grow consistently.

A word of caution here. Don't go for a positioning concept you think will be the most appealing if your organisation and brand can't live up to it. It's obviously a lot easier if all you have to do is communicate the new positioning concept; a lot more difficult and painful if you have to change the way your organisation works and behaves as well.

You'll need to create a value proposition of clear concise and compelling reasons why clients should buy your service and it should also clearly differentiate you from competitors. A deep knowledge of your clients' needs is essential and the proposition should be expressed from their perspective and talk about the experience and benefits of buying or using the service.

At this stage, you should also define the quality of service and pricing to perfectly support the positioning and value proposition – here, you are setting your clients' expectations. Charge too much and they could be disappointed because they don't feel they've received value for money; charge too little and they're disappointed you've let them down and not provided the quality of service they'd expected.

You also need to establish how you're going to monitor and maintain the quality of service to provide the consistency of experience that every successful brand needs to encourage loyalty and repeat purchase.

This process is a highly collaborative one, stimulating you and your team to discuss ideas and concepts and fully engage with each other on the subject. It all promotes understanding, co-creation and buy in – three very useful things to have in action within your organisation when re-launching your brand or moving to a new market position.

If you have more than one service brand you'll need to decide how your portfolio or family of brands will relate to, and be differentiated from, each other. This is what's called brand architecture and there are three main types. The first is an umbrella or family brand with all the sub brands sharing the family name and being visually similar eg. Virgin Active, Virgin Media or Virgin Atlantic.

The second type are endorsed brands that all look distinctly different from each other but have a common parent brand whose endorsement adds credibility and reassurance eg. Nestlé in the confectionery market with brands like Aero, Yorkie and Smarties. The third are individual product brands that don't have any parent branding whatsoever.

Brand architecture is about brand building in a competitive environment and is based on your strategy. The way all your brands fit together should enable them to compete strongly and clearly in each of your chosen markets, visually describing their inter-relationships, whilst supporting and reinforcing your overall goal.

This stage is key to the future success of your brand, so you'll need to summarise your findings and insights in a creative brief. This must be shared with everyone who needs to approve it before creating your brand story, your point of view, your brand name (if you need one) and then going on to develop your brand identity.

Stage 3 of your branding journey

DEVELOPING YOUR BRAND STORY AND POINT OF VIEW

In a highly competitive world, storytelling is a great way to cut through a lot of dull, corporate waffle. First though, and based on the agreed brand positioning concept, you'll need to draft a vision, mission and brand values (or DNA as some people prefer to call them). Share all this with a small number of key people from every part of the organisation because they'll all have relevant input.

This is an iterative and collaborative process that builds consensus and agreement. However, it does also flush out how everyone feels about the brand. If you can't find common ground, then you may need to talk separately to people about why they feel the way they do – otherwise you won't have full support for the brand when it's launched.

Once all this has been achieved, you'll need to draft an engaging and compelling brand story. One that your clients and your own people won't be able to resist. This should be based on **why** your brand does what it does, and not **what** it does. The bigger the why, the better the story and the more appealing and successful the brand will be. I appreciate that in the commercial world organisations are created to make money and to be good to their communities and the environment. So the brand story helps provide an element of compulsion for people to part with their money.

The brand story is developed from the positioning concept and supporting statement, and will help you describe why your clients should buy your service – all neatly summarised as a client proposition. You'll also need to develop your key brand messages backed up by your proof points for believability. Dig deep – very deep – to discover all the interesting things and insights about your brand. Then express the most important ones as key messages – not just as bullet points in a presentation, on packaging or on your website, but wrapped up as an interesting, engaging and persuasive brand story. They can also be shortened down to pithy, punchy headlines for your website, advertisements or Twitter feed. No one has much time, so the brand story shouldn't be too long. What it must be is very engaging with a tone of voice to perfectly reflect your brand's personality.

If you're a service-based organisation you'll know very well how to serve your clients but you may find it difficult to articulate precisely what makes you better and different from your competitors. You'll need to reveal all the unique things you do and provide solid reasons for this to happen. These competitive advantages or hidden gems are often buried deep within your operations, but make all the difference to your clients on a day-to-day basis. Indeed, you may find it useful to speak to your clients in some depth to unearth them. I find that most service-based organisations completely overlook these hidden gems because they don't understand the storytelling potential of them.

Once you've uncovered them, polished them up and presented them as an integral part of your brand story they'll be very powerful and persuasive. Use them to help

your brand overcome negative perceptions, or quash mischievous rumours spread by competitors in an attempt to undermine or shift your brand's position in the minds of your clients.

What if you don't have any genuinely unique points of difference? In this instance, you'll need to develop a point of view of the future. This should be used to fully support the position you've defined to appeal to your ideal clients. You need to develop ways of clearly outlining your point of view, supported with relevant facts and figures that will persuade your clients to look at their problems from this new perspective. This gives you a joint platform to move forward together with.

There's another reason for developing your brand story and your key messages – and that's to make it easier to brief copywriters, photographers and film makers. It will help them understand your brand's personality and its tone of voice. This will ensure your brand looks and sounds the same across all channels of communication.

But that's not all. It's easy to forget about an important group of individuals – your own people. So learning what they currently think about your brand will enable you to take them on the same brand journey that you've travelled – just a shorter and straighter version of it. Engaging them in your brand story will help them buy into it and understand what it means for your clients. They'll also learn how they should personify it in the way that they appear, behave and communicate.

Stage 4 of your branding journey

NAMING YOUR BRAND

Brand naming can begin once your brand story has been developed and agreed. Think of your brand name like the title of a new book. It's far easier to create a fantastic title that encapsulates everything in the novel having written it first. This is precisely the approach for brand naming. It also makes it far easier to judge the strength of a name if you have agreed the story that it's telling. It reduces arguments and helps to gain a consensus. Never an easy task!

A good brand name should be memorable, easy to spell and pronounce, and not be trendy, clever or funny – unless it's perfect for your particular clients. It should be strategically different from your competitors and imply the brand benefits with a symbolic association that strengthens the image of the service.

EXAMPLE: Rapport is an excellent example of a good brand name for a company that provides corporate organisations with high quality front and back of house guest services. Building rapport is so central to the experience that once you know the reason for the name you won't forget it.

Here are the brand naming stages you should go through.

1. Agree the naming strategy. Is the name necessary? What does it need to achieve? How will it work with any other brands or services within your organisation? Agree to evaluate it objectively against the brand story and the evaluation criteria in point 4.
2. Brainstorm relevant words/names based on what the brand or service does, what the benefits are, why it's different and any words that are unique about the service. In the brainstorming process, remember that ideas for great names often start from unexpected places, so don't discount any too quickly. The process can generate hundreds of names and, in the most traditional way, the best thing to do is write each one down on a separate piece of paper! This makes it easier to put them into categories and it helps with the evaluation process. The final name should be the one that perfectly represents your brand story.
3. Turn the words into potential names and put them into one of the six following categories. 'Descriptive' names like British Airways, 'Suggestive' ones like Twitter, 'Abstract' like Kodak, 'Combined' ones like AstraZeneca that didn't exist before, 'Composite' ones like Facebook that use existing words juxtaposed to create something new – or 'Real' world names like Apple which use words that don't have an obvious link to the product or service they represent.

4. Create a shortlist by evaluating the potential names against the following evaluation criteria:

Does it tell your brand story?
 Is it easy to remember?
 Does it sound or look good?
 Is it easy to pronounce?
 Does it have a positive association?
 Is it an offensive word in a foreign language?
 Is it available and protectable?

You should then be able to choose the best name.

5. Test the chosen name. The act of creating a new and unique name is very challenging. But ironically for the creative process, the most difficult stage is establishing whether the chosen name is available and protectable. In the first instance, the name can be searched for and checked on-line through a general search. Search engines will throw up references to any of the shortlisted names from around the world in a fraction of a second.

The shortlisted names with their respective scores, along with your brand story and any relevant findings should be shared with everyone. The name that helps tell your brand story the best will stand out from the rest by perfectly representing your brand's personality. You'll also be able to assess the suitability and strength of it against the others shortlisted using the evaluation criteria, and make that all important brand naming decision.

6. Protect and trade mark the chosen name. Depending on what your aspirations are for your new brand, you'll need to decide whether to register it as a trade mark. You should search for, and check, whether any of the shortlisted names are trade marked in the relevant classes of goods and services and in the geographical territories you plan to operate in. You can quickly search and check domain names by undertaking a 'domain name' search and using one of the specialist websites listed. If the domain names are already registered, you can also see whether they're actively being used. If they're not, the registrant may be willing to sell. If they're already registered but not active it's worth looking at the expiry date for the domain name because the registrant may no longer want it and you can pick it up.

Whilst you can quickly and easily undertake your own searches, you should appoint a specialist trade mark attorney to undertake the relevant searches on your behalf before progressing with the chosen name to the design stage. You will incur additional design fees if you get the project underway and then find you can't use the name you'd like. Your trade mark attorney will also look after the process of registering a trade mark which can take over six months to complete because there are several steps after your application. This will include an

examination against the Trade Marks Act's rules to establish whether it's similar to any existing trade marks. Assuming that it doesn't infringe anything existing, your application will be published in the Trade Marks Journal so that others have the chance to oppose it. If there are no objections, your trade mark can then be registered.

Stage 5 of your branding journey

CREATING YOUR BRAND IDENTITY AND THE EXPERIENCE

Your brand will be made up of different components carefully combined to create a simple, clear and memorable brand identity. Even long established brands lose their edge at some point in their lives and keeping them fresh and up to date will keep them looking contemporary and of the moment.

At the heart of every brand identity is the logo, and this is where several concept sketches need to be evaluated against each other. These days, logos have to work in many different formats and sizes on static media; in print, on vehicles, buildings and uniforms and also in a dynamic digital form; in film, on-line and on mobile. Your logo has to have the capability of being adaptable and highly flexible. However – it should also be simple. In a complex world, it pays to make things as simple as possible for your clients. It provides them with clarity and confidence instead of distraction and disorientation. It generates loyalty and commands a premium because you're making their lives easier.

Choose the strongest concept sketch based on a discussion of the relative merits of each. The one you finally select will then go through meticulous stages of development until it captures the very essence of your brand.

You'll also need to create a strap line that supports your brand's position or explains what your brand does. Whether you use a strap line or not depends on how well known your brand name is and whether it's being re-positioned. You can use the same creative process for developing the strap line as for the creation of the brand name. The same background information applies. Your strap line can either be one that describes what your brand does or if the brand name itself is descriptive then it can provide inspirational support. It will depend on your particular circumstances.

At this stage your brand's typefaces and colour palette are developed to appeal to your ideal clients and yet stand out from your competitors. It's far too easy and safe to look and feel like all the other brands in your market. And this does happen. This phenomenon has surfaced through research in project after project, and market after market. It takes real confidence and bravery to stand apart, but it will pay dividends in the end.

Selecting a photographic or illustrative style as part of the brand identity will help it to be distinctive from others and enhance the appeal for your clients even further.

The creation of a unique image library of photographs or films for your brand for all those rapport building opportunities we've talked about is essential. The benefits are that you're in control of the creative style and you'll also own the rights to the content. Use the

shots where you want and as often as you want. You'll never have to pay for stock shots again or have the fear that you'll see them being used elsewhere. With a competitor!

If a picture paints a thousand words, then a film can tell your whole brand story in a couple of minutes. You can't beat its ability to hold attention, connect with your audience and evoke emotion. On-line or in presentations, and especially with a great soundtrack, many brands now use film as part of their communication.

The tone of voice for your brand is also critical. Nothing will undermine it faster than poorly written or jargon laden me-me-me copy. A professional copywriter will be able to get under the skin of your brand, putting themselves in the shoes of your clients to craft copy that is engaging and informative – and that will help compel them to action.

Do you need to connect clients with your brand in-store, in offices, restaurants, exhibitions or pop-up events? It's where your key brand messages are combined with outstanding service to create personalised brand experiences. What will excite and engage your clients and make their experience the most memorable?

In your discussions, answer these questions: What is the brand experience going to be like? Describe it in detail. Why is the brand experience going to be different to the existing one? How is it going to be better? What will connect clients to your brand emotionally? Where will they find, meet and engage with your brand? What will the quality of service be like? How will the standard of the quality of service be set, monitored and managed, or improved? How will clients buy from your brand? How will they be supported through the crucial honeymoon period and then into a long term and rewarding relationship? What will they feel like throughout? How will the experience be memorable? What happens if anything goes wrong? Who is responsible for sorting it out? How will you make sure the brand experience gets better and better next year – and every year after that?

Most organisations have brand guidelines of some description that were created or updated the last time they re-invented or refreshed their brand. In the future, there won't be any guidelines as you recognise them today because they'll fail to keep pace with the change of an agile organisation like yours. They will be useless at providing any more than the most basic rules on where your logo should and shouldn't go, and what colours and fonts can be used.

Stage 6 of your branding journey

MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS

You've defined your clients' emotional experience of your brand and planned their journey with it. Now you'll want to motivate them with compelling communications to do what you want – by giving them the right information, help and support they need at every stage of their own specific journey. You need to pinpoint ideal times and places for engaging 'conversations' – from their very first contact with your brand, through the initial honeymoon period and into a long term relationship.

You need to write down your requirements in a clear brief with your objectives, budget and deliverables so you can evaluate the creative solution against it.

How you decide to tell your brand story and what media you use will depend on what suits your clients best and what you agree between you and your agency. They'll have a view, and so will you. There are lots of different techniques that will help bring your brand story to life in engaging ways, from photography, films and copy all the way up to multi-sensory experiences and events.

It's very tempting to use your own photos, or films and write your own copy but I urge you to use professionals wherever possible. You'll achieve

a far better result – and faster. The quality of your communications will set the expectations for the quality and cost of your service. If your communications look cheap and the tone of voice in your copy undermines your brand's position, then you'll find it difficult to justify your premium when it comes to contract negotiations.

Make sure that your communications don't undersell and that they work across many different channels. Your clients will be interacting with your brand and request information in all sorts of different ways, jumping freely between channels whenever and wherever they feel most comfortable. Your communications need to do the same. Often, the first time they'll experience your brand will be via their mobile – on their sofa, or on the move. You need to build brand awareness and drive inbound enquiries across all your rapport building opportunities.

If you want to mark the launch of your brand with an exceptional event then you'll need to create one in a great location that clients will want to attend. It needs interesting and inspirational speakers and perhaps an appearance by a person or celebrity that clients respect, admire and want to meet. You should bring your brand to life by developing exciting events that will give your clients highly memorable and personalised experiences that accurately reflect your brand's personality and point of view.

In all likelihood, your clients probably still use brochures, as well as attending events or viewing slide presentation decks to help them decide which brands to buy from. I know we all live in a digital world but there is still a place for highly tactile and physical printed materials. With the quality of digital printing so good now, even a handful of copies can be produced without costing the earth and can be personalised to each individual.

As we've previously discussed, clients are more in control of the sales process than ever before. They come to your door with more information about you than previous generations had access to. Many of them will avoid sales people until they are a significant way up the 'trust curve'. The use of compelling communications based on your brand story at appropriate opportunities on the lower slopes of that trust curve will ease the task of your sales people when engaging with them. It's here that they'll want to hear from your internal experts. So don't hide them away. After all, their knowledge and experience is what really separates you from your competitors.

You need to tell your brand story clearly, confidently and convincingly. If you build a strong brand you don't have to sell so hard.

Stage 7 of your branding journey

ENGAGING YOUR PEOPLE

You know that your people are your brand's most important ambassadors. Creating engaging communications aimed at them is essential. If your own people don't get your brand, how do you expect your clients and prospects to buy it? How do you change the way your people think? How do you explain that the client experience is more than just a pleasant and efficient transactional service? Most importantly, how do you use internal employee communications to positively influence, or if necessary, actually change the way they appear, behave and communicate to personify your brand?

You need to engage and motivate your people to get behind your brand by changing the way they think and work together. You can achieve this by developing communications that take them on a journey to challenge their preconceptions and show how they can make a significant impact on the client experience.

It's easy to over promise the quality of your service and just as easy to undermine all those rapport building opportunities if you haven't planned them carefully enough. The smallest things often make the biggest difference but can also cause the biggest damage.

At work, most people want to personally develop as far as their abilities and ambition will allow because it's more interesting and more rewarding for them and their families. They also like a challenging job as it adds interest to their work and gives them a sense of satisfaction. However, it mustn't be so challenging that it's impossible to achieve! You can improve the skills of your people by packaging and presenting specialist training and development courses for everyone, whatever their aspirations. That way they're fully equipped and confident to do the job expected, and you get the very best from them.

Recognising outstanding performances that match your brand values is a great way to reinforce outstanding behaviour. This is all about two-way conversations rather than top-down monologues. You can build engagement and participation by providing easy ways of gathering feedback from everyone on how to improve the little things they do every day, as well as sharing their successes.

On top of that you can make your people feel really important and appreciated by recognising and rewarding them.

Stage 8 of our branding journey

HELPING EVERYONE FIND YOUR BRAND

You need to identify all the groups of people, or personas as they're called in the on-line world, like prospective customers, clients or employees that want to find and engage with you. The trick is to make sure that all your digital communications give them the confidence to start a conversation with your brand. Each group will have their own specific needs, but for prospective customers or clients in particular, it's important to uncover the problems they face and the issues they're trying to solve. You will be able to design unique digital communications and experiences to help them find the help, guidance and information required. By doing this, you can move away from running tactical sales promotional campaigns with all the traditional gimmicks that proliferate in your market. Your brand shifts from competing on price to one that provides useful, helpful and relevant content. Invest all your efforts into understanding them better than anyone else – and you should be able to charge a higher price because your brand is the perfect fit for them.

Designing a simple and easy-to-use website that is well optimised for different types of personas and search engines is a delicate balancing act. People need to find your website even if they don't know your brand

name – this necessitates every web page being suitably optimised. You should also be able to update it easily and increase your domain authority with link building and traffic driving activities on social media.

Great communications will not only attract the right type of customers or clients, they'll also inspire the right type of potential employees, suppliers and freelancers to get in touch with your organisation. They'll all love your brand story and want to be part of it. This will either be because they need the type of services you offer or because they have the right attitude and can help deliver what your brand promises – in which case, they'll help it grow.

This saves you time, effort and money by not having to search them out for yourself. They've found you because they like what they see. All you need is a way to keep the dialogue going until the right opportunities arise for you to work together.

You'll need to find where your prospective customers or clients spend their time on-line, which authors are influential, which websites they visit, what they're saying and what they're sharing. Then you'll need to create relevant digital communications for them, which will include helpful, useful and relevant content. This will make it easy for them to find, view and share it with

others in the same situation as themselves, and present themselves for you to work together. It's essential to have a range of content that answers typical questions and addresses basic fears along with an easy way to start a conversation.

People are using their mobile phones for brand engagement, loyalty and new ways to make payments. They might have browsed your website out of normal business hours, and then emailed you later that week whilst on the go. They'll be searching for information, help and support at any time of the day or night that works best for them. Make sure your brand is ready.

More and more organisations are using social media. It certainly gives business-to-consumer brands a way to engage people on a one-to-one basis – a way not even dreamt of before the social media revolution. It definitely works for charities and not-for-profit organisations who have a benevolent message. Does it have a place in business-to-business? Well yes and no. Yes in terms of positioning and conveying personality, but no when it comes to the formal process of tendering for contracts where there are strict rules of engagement. The use of social media during this period would not be seen as appropriate or impartial. Just under half of B2B buyers are opposed to using social media in the later stages of the buying process. But it will definitely help

with getting your brand on the right shortlist to begin with. Or starting a conversation that leads to a face-to-face meeting where you have the chance to understand your client's needs far better.

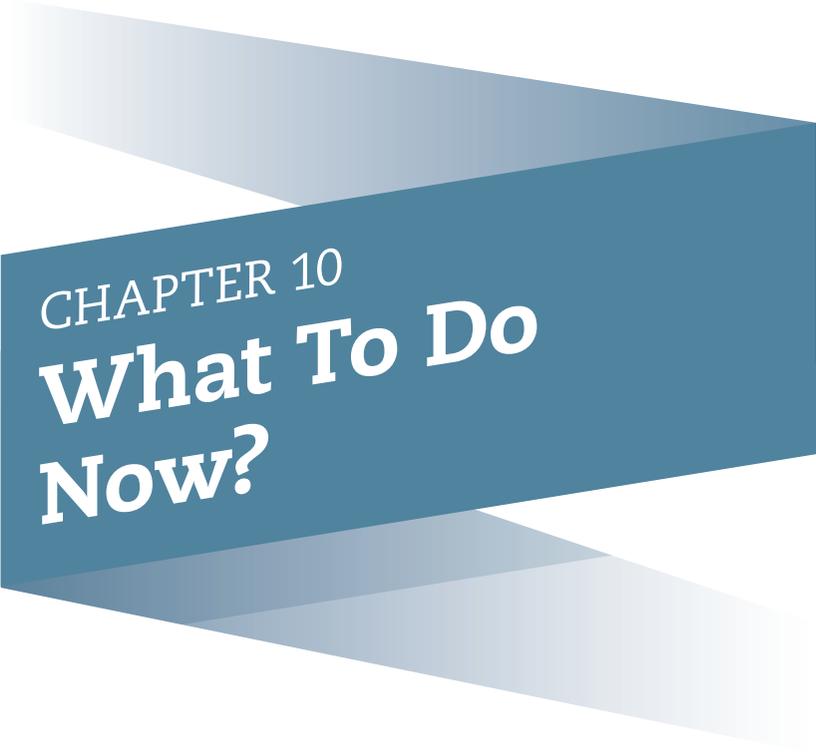
People's attitudes to social media fall into three groups. The first don't see the point – to them social media is like talking about what was on television last night. The second group keep in touch by text, and would use social media more if they thought anyone was interested in what they had to say. The third group live on-line, share frequently and comment on absolutely everything, however trivial. What groups do your clients belong to? How is your brand interacting with them all on-line? How influential is it?

All your digital communications should be geared towards helping your prospects and clients find your brand easily, build your position, share your point of view and offer them help, guidance and information, before selling to them.

Stage 9 of your branding journey

ADOPTING CONTINUOUS BRANDING

Now that your brand is in good shape and everything is in place to help you succeed, it's time to push onwards and upwards. Read chapter 7 again to remind yourself of the five principles of Continuous Branding so you can grow your organisation on a consistent and sustainable basis whilst motivating your people to build your brand.

A 3D blue ribbon graphic, tilted and floating in the air. The ribbon is a dark blue color and has a slight shadow underneath it. The text is white and positioned on the top surface of the ribbon.

CHAPTER 10
**What To Do
Now?**

Think differently. Do the right thing. Make a plan and do it now. Start by making a short list of your objectives. Keep it simple. Then think about a timeframe for change. Make it realistic. Not too long – and not too short either.

Decide who are the right people in your organisation to involve in the project, and pencil in a budget you think appropriate. And you're off!

I've shared my insights and knowledge with you but is there anything else that you'd like to know? Get in touch and I'll answer any questions or clarify any points. You can connect with me, share your experiences and tell me your stories. I'm keen to know how you get on as I'd like to feature the most inspiring examples in a new book for the next generation of Continuous Branders.

Is there anybody else in your organisation that would be interested in this book and that you'd like to share it with? Are there any other ways I can help you? For instance, speaking at an event, conference or perhaps with some consultancy?

Finally, good luck and you have my very best wishes.

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Acknowledgements

To all the fantastic clients whose branding journeys I've shared and shaped. And to clients and associates who have kindly critiqued this book for me. You all know who you are, but especially to Greg Mace with whom I've worked long hours over more years than I care to remember.

To Cal Jones for her unswerving support throughout my career, for her editorial input and hatred of hyphens.

To Mark Dresh for his enthusiasm over all the time I've known him and for his positive encouragement to the synopsis for this book and to Kevin Desert for designing this book and infographics.



Craig Thatcher is a branding specialist, author and managing director of Greenfisher.

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He graduated from the University of Southampton with an Honours degree in Biology in 1982, is married with two grown-up children and lives in the Royal County of Berkshire, United Kingdom.

Craig has managed to distil a compelling blend of experience and insight into a short and very manageable read.

Shining through on every page are his passion for the importance of branding and his drive to help people get a lot better at it. My favourite quote?

“If you build a strong brand, you don't have to sell so hard.”

As a fellow writer I enjoyed the personal, lively and challenging style. No marketing gobbledegook.

Roger Tidball - Ginger Communications

[#continuousbranding](#)



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