

**Continuous**

**Branding**

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

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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.

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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](http://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.

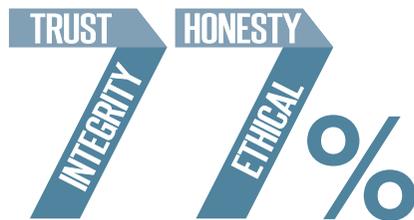
*EXAMPLE: Pizza Hut in the UK has already combined the role of director of human resources and marketing because the restaurant operator understands that its people are its brand. This decision will pay dividends in the future because few foodservice businesses understand how the two functions can work 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.



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