

Continuous

Branding

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

Craig Thatcher

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.

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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 your 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.



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Paul Macbeth is Managing Director of Macbeth, a leading independent chartered insurance broker and financial adviser. He is securing his brand's future with Greenfisher as his creative partner.

Craig Thatcher
branding specialist_author_managing director
M +44(0)7497 462520
craig@greenfisher.co.uk

www.greenfisher.co.uk
T +44 (0)118 933 8558

dba design
business
association