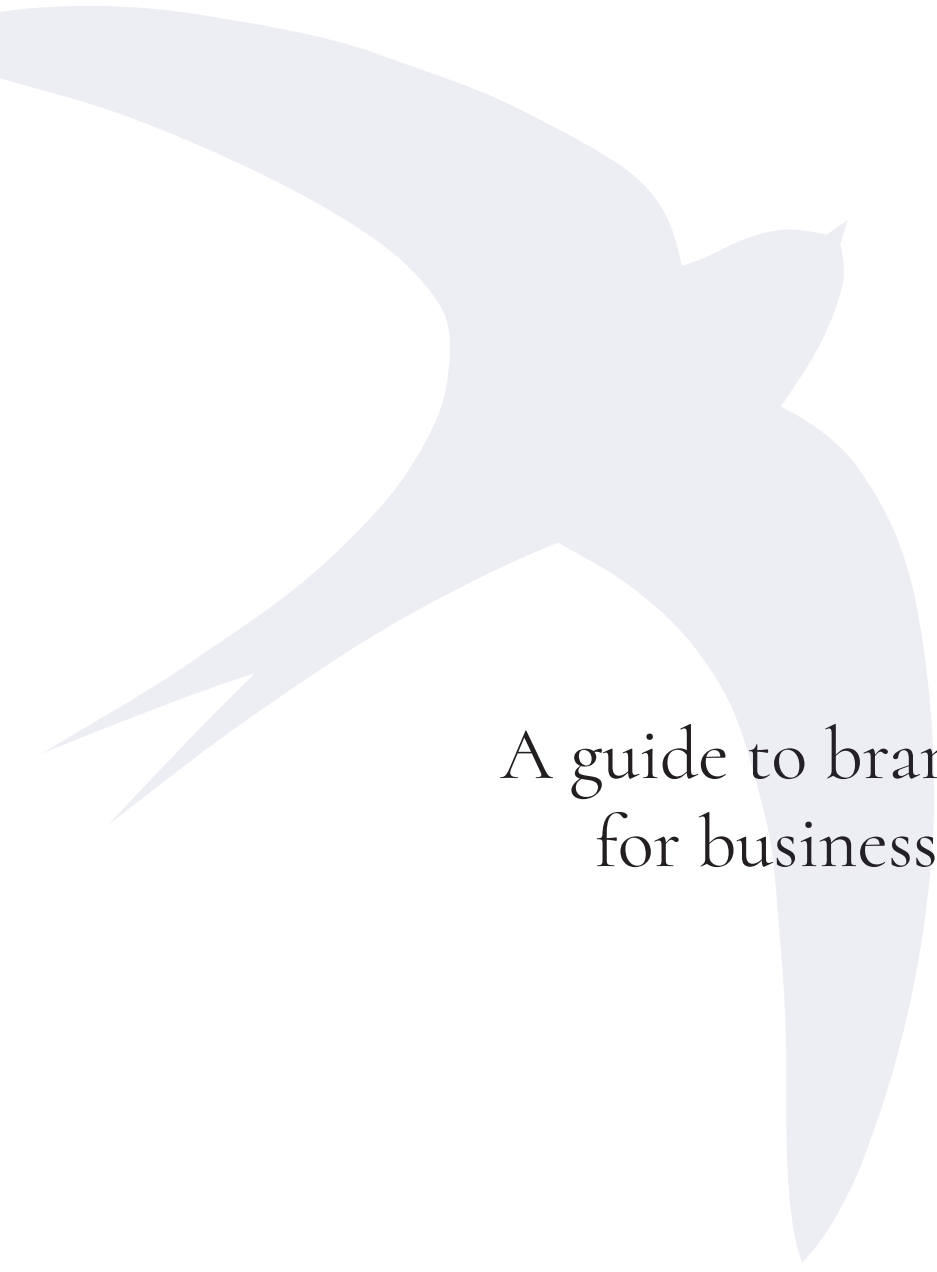
JASMINE COTTAGE

MARKETING



A guide to branding for businesses

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What is Branding?

Branding is a term that is often misused, being employed as the professional-sounding word for logo. But it is so much more than a logo, and so much more than catchy word. It is about personality and promises, identity and openness.

Just like a great friend, a brand has character and personality, style and presence, trustworthiness and loyalty. There are moments when they are the centre of your world and there are times when they step quietly away.

Your own business will have its own personality, whether you have consciously engineered it or not. Its personality will derive from all the touch-points your customers have with your business, be that through the telephone, face-to-face or your website for instance, or as direct interaction with your services or product delivery. In practice it is the combination of all these elements that build your brand and even if each of these elements is satisfactory in their own right, inconsistency across the range will lead to a confused customer experience, and your business will appear as inconsistent too.

Having an appropriate and consistent brand approach right across your business allows a rapport to be built with your customers, one which is a projection of your business personality. Of course it is vital that you deliver on your brand promises, high quality products or services, delivered on time and as promised.

Competitors

Very often, the starting point for successful branding is with your competitors. Researching and analysing those businesses relevant to your market is a key step in deciding how to progress.

With those competitor brands documented, your task to establish what works and what doesn't becomes more straightforward. Knowing how the more successful businesses in your market conduct themselves will help you get a feel for the right tone of voice for your own business. This may be a natural progression of the approach adopted by your competitors or it may be the development of a new and unique approach.

Whichever way, the key point is to *differentiate* your business from the competition. These points of differentiation will be tied to the business advantages that you have and/or those you offer your customers - a novel product, a superior service or the manner in which you operate.

Tone of voice

Tone of voice as a concept in branding has a very particular meaning. Generally, it can be applied to the entire look and feel of a brand at any or all of its physical incarnations - website, signage, stores, brochures for instance. But for the purposes of this document, I will use the term *tone of voice* to refer to a specific written or spoken style.

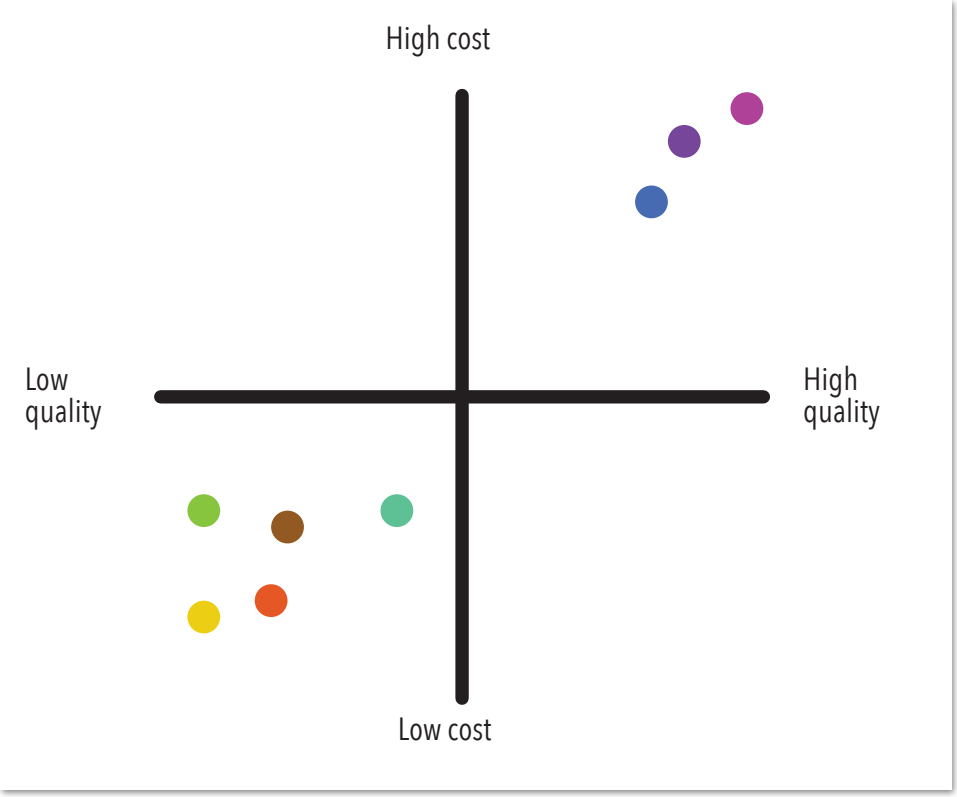
Some people consider that, in business, there is only one appropriate tone of voice, that there is a correct formal style, as was the case with the received pronunciation of the BBC in the 50s. But this just isn't so. When we communicate with each other as humans, we aspire to come across as authentic and trustworthy. And that means being ourselves, not trying to emulate someone else's personality, accent or speaking style. The same is true with businesses dealing with their customers; authenticity comes from being open, natural and unforced. It is using language in a straightforward way, and being willing to communicate with your customers one-to-one, with respect but also with confidence.

Businesses need a tone of voice appropriate to their brand, the sort of relationship they wish to build with their customers and crucially one which they can adopt naturally. For instance, do you want to project an air of quiet authority or high energy, optimism or efficiency, direction or assistance, to name a few? The thing about tone of voice is that it is all but invisible when it is done well, and painfully obvious when not. By leaving tone of voice to chance, it is all too easy to inadvertently fall into the latter.

Positioning

The *positioning* of a business within its sector is about finding a niche that is both achievable to your business offering and occupying a position where you can make a strong impact.

The factors that will come into play for your business will be relevant to your sector or locality. Using your competitor research, draw up a simple diagram to map out the competitors' positioning against relevant factors. Then pin down your desired positioning in that diagram.



Take this example above. Let's assume each data point represents a chocolate brand in the UK market and that the key factors in this market is cost and quality. Think of any chocolate brand and you will likely be able to

accurately position it on this map (try Cadburys and Green & Blacks). With the many millions spent on advertising and promotion in this sector over many years it is perhaps not surprising that we are all experts in chocolate brand positioning!

So when it comes to positioning your own business, you are an expert in your field. Build your own positioning map and plot where you are. Then consider whether your brand accurately reflects your position in the market. Is your brand consistent with the place in the market you occupy or wish to occupy. If you are at the high end, does your brand (that is, all the customer touch-points) truly look high end. Are you cutting corners that shouldn't be cut for a business in this position.

I acknowledge that it is hard to be fully objective about something as close to you as your business, so try to honest with yourself, and ask people you know and trust whether your brand fully reflects your position in the market and your aspirations for where you want that business to go.

Telling the story

Successful brands develop a way of telling their story in as direct and compelling a manner as possible. They consistently retell this story through every touch-point with their customers, from their website and social media, through to advertising and brochure-ware, and through their people.

We know when we meet such a business; their personality is delivered with such clarity ,consistency and authenticity that we have no doubt what they are about. And we believe it too. Such brands should be the inspiration for you.

When you think of well-known brands, consider what their story is. What it is that makes them stand out. For example, is Nike just a running shoe manufacturer, or is their brand more about the sort of person you are if you wear their products. Is Waitrose just about higher priced grocery items or about trust and exclusivity? Or how about BMW? Dynamic vehicles or a status symbol? The stories these brands tell sets them apart from their competitors, but the products they sell live up to their promise.

So what is your story? How will your customers identify strongly with you and your products or services. What sets you apart? What makes you tick? What will make your customers tick?

Working across multiple mediums and platforms

There are now many more platforms than ever including websites, social media or video. And of course print and physical signage never went away. Because of this, the functional elements of the brand, such as the fonts, colours and layouts, need to be compatible across these platforms. The brand elements need to be adaptable across all those platforms that are appropriate for your business now and in the future.

Ensuring the brand works in all environments will give you the ultimate flexibility as you grow your bsuiness – just because you do not envisage using Facebook to promote doesn't mean that it won't become essential for you in a year or two.

Checklist

Research

- Consider the positioning of your business in your marketplace - the factors that will come into play for your business will be relevant to your sector. Use a simple diagram to map out the sector factors and competitors' positioning. Then locate your current and desired positioning in that diagram.

Consider

- Make a decision about the requirements your brand needs to fulfil to accurately reflect its position in the market and how it will articulate its differentiation to competitors.

- What are the key messages you want to communicate about your brand? What is the story you wish to tell your customers?

Develop

- Decide upon the "voice" for your company that reflects your brand. This voice will be applied to all communications online and off. Ensure that your voice is authentic and achievable - you can't have one without the other.

- Develop a great logo and visual scheme and ensure it is applied to every communication. Don't worry if you think this repetition is boring. To the outside world amid all the noise and crowded promotional space, that repetition will appear reassuring and consistent.

Implement

- Integrate your brand. Branding extends to every aspect of your business--how you answer your phones, what your salespeople wear on sales calls, your e-mail signature, everything.

- Develop a tagline. Write a memorable, meaningful and concise statement that captures the essence of your brand.

- Design templates and create brand standards for your marketing materials. Use the same colour scheme, logo placement, look and feel throughout. You don't need to be clever, just consistent.

Live up to your brand

- Be true to your brand. Deliver on your brand promises.

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