

Practical Guide

# Creating a Brand Strategy



## What is it?

A brand strategy is a plan for brand management that answers the big questions: who, where, why, what and when? Building a strong brand requires a continuous commitment to excellence and an understanding of the qualities that define the brand. A brand is not a logo, it's a consistent attitude and a carefully managed experience that meets or surpasses consumer expectations.

People first used branding to indicate ownership of a territory or object by marking them with indelible symbols. Over time these symbols or 'logos' acquired meaning by association. In the 18th century and the boom of the industrial revolution, commercial enterprises used brand trademarks to guarantee provenance and consumer satisfaction. Today branding fulfills all those requirements but has the potential to create communities of like-minded people through alignment with an ideal that transcends the physical.

# Why is it important?

A brand strategy provides metrics for brand management that makes it possible to gauge if the brand is effective in realising its intended goals.

The reasons to formulate a brand strategy include:

1. **Differentiation** – Branding highlights the differences that make a product or service better than its market competitors.
2. **Emotion** – Branding creates a bond between the brand and the consumer that builds emotional ties of loyalty.
3. **Added value** – Branding increases value by adding an emotional significance that exceeds the rational value of the product or service.
4. **Communication** – Branding is an effective way to convey information:
  - Introduce a new organisation, product or service
  - Rebuilding a lost reputation
  - Unite or consolidate a group
  - New ownership
  - New positioning
  - Attract and retain staff, investors and customers

# What can you do?

## Formulate a brand strategy

To formulate a winning brand strategy, you will need to be able to identify your 'Key Brand Criteria'. The Key Performance Indicators of the brand strategy must be constantly monitored and reviewed to ensure the continuity and consistency of the brand experience:

### 1. How does the brand improve the world?

**Purpose:** A brand's purpose is the benefit it provides and may be an emotional or intellectual ideal that reflects the culture and motivation of the organisation behind the brand. A brand has the potential to represent an emotional quality that goes beyond the functionality of the product or service.

### 2. What is the brand's ambition?

**Vision:** A brand's vision is an ambition for the future; it's where you want to be in five or ten years' time. It's the duty of the Brand Champion (the Chief Executive Officer, Managing Director or Founder) to communicate a picture of success that can be shared and believed in by the brand's stakeholders.

### 3. What does the brand stand for?

**Values:** A brand's values are the qualities that it stands for and the principles its founders believe in. Values and their defined behaviours are the guidelines that form a brand's moral compass and must be endorsed by management. They provide direction on how the brand may behave in any given situation and they influence the actions and decisions of its stakeholders. You can recruit employees for their values, reward staff performance by values and train people for values. To be effective, leaders must wholeheartedly endorse the brand's values and demonstrate by example how to live by them. When these behaviours are repeated intuitively they become the corporate culture.

### 4. How is the brand going to achieve its vision?

**Mission statement:** An effective mission statement is a manifesto for the brand that combines the purpose, vision and values in an inspiring declaration directed at management, staff and stakeholders. It is a charter that makes it clear who you are, what you stand for and what you want to achieve.

### 5. Why do I need the brand?

**Proposition:** The brand proposition is the unique selling point (USP) that differentiates your brand from its competitors. It's the special quality that is hardest to emulate and provides a compelling reason to believe in the brand. The proposition is not restricted to the physical attributes of the product or service and may be conveyed through a unique attitude and culture.

### 6. Where is the brand in relation to its competitors?

**Positioning:** Positioning is the art of placing your brand at the forefront of a consumer's considerations relative to your market competitors and according to their physical, emotional and financial needs. It is a challenge to change a brand's position once a perception sets in.

### 7. What is the brand's character?

**Personality:** A brand's personality is determined by its values, behaviours and culture and experienced through its leadership, people and identity. Imagine your brand as a human being and ask yourself how old would they be, are they male or female, are they fussy or relaxed, fun or serious and would you want to spend time with them? Identifying a brand archetype or persona may prove invaluable in maintaining continuity.

### 8. Who is interested in the brand?

**Audience:** It has never been easier to gain external insights about your brand by observing and monitoring social media. Qualitative and Quantitative audience analysis is advisable to profile, understand and segment your audience and use this data to create customer personas to help you visualise them. Know your brand and be true to it and don't try to be all things to all people and remember that some of the strongest brands have made a virtue of appealing to a niche audience.

# Get your culture working for you

It is often said that culture can consume strategy, so it is essential that you get your people on your side and committed to the brand strategy. Corporate culture is determined by the attitudes, beliefs and values of its employees. A strong culture can be a brand's most envied asset, attracting both customers and the highest calibre of engaged staff.

## 1. What is the story behind the brand?

**History:** Do you know the story behind the brand, how it began and who its key figures were? People are inquisitive and want to know how it all started. This powerful asset can provide inspiration to tackle present issues or fuel campaigns and content marketing. Understanding where the brand came from can help us understand where it is going.

## 2. What are the beliefs and aspirations that underpin the brand's values?

**Ethos:** A brand's ethos is the realisation of the brand's purpose, vision and values. Together these aspects of the brand strategy shape a set of principles that inform its social responsibility. An ethical stance can define a brand and provide a deeper emotional and psychological bond.

## 3. How does the brand express its personality through language, vocabulary and tone of voice?

**Language:** The brand name and its strapline are the first steps in the verbal expression of the brand personality. Choice of word and nuance can communicate an attitude that is as much a part of the brand's identity as its logo and name. The language of brands can spread by word of mouth and have the potential to enter into everyday use when they capture a mood.

## 4. An organisation is only as good as its people. What qualities define the brand ambassadors who bring the brand to life and embody its spirit?

**People:** Employer branding is the practice of growing a brand so that it is equally attractive as a prospective employer as it is as a provider of great products and services. The process of recruitment, interview and onboarding are all brand touchpoints that have a critical impact on the perception of the brand. The employees of an organisation have the potential to be its greatest asset when practicing the brand values.

## 5. Does the brand champion succeed at providing dynamic leadership to inspire their colleagues and stakeholders to believe in the brand?

**Leadership:** The 'brand champion' is the public face of the brand and it's their duty to set a good example. This role is usually filled by the Chief Executive Officer, Managing Director or business owner. As the brand champion, their duty is to inspire and motivate the workforce to do their best. The brand champion should acknowledge and encourage their employees, excite their customers and lead with conviction and vision.

## 6. What unique customs, traditions and anniversaries does the brand observe?

**Traditions:** Cultures create customs and traditions through repeated behaviours which can include; the way an organisation commemorates an important anniversary, how it welcomes new members, how it celebrates significant calendar events and launches new products or services. It is important to take note of these customs and value them as indicators of a thriving culture. Traditions have the potential to provide excellent public relations opportunities and strengthen the brand's reputation.

## 7. What distinctive sensory experiences are special to the brand?

**Senses:** We experience brands through our senses and the sensations we feel are a measure of quality for the product or service. Every organisation, regardless of product or service category, has the potential to use sensory branding to make better brand experiences: How would your brand sound if I made a telephone call to your office? How would your brand taste if you offered me a coffee in a meeting? How would your brand smell if I sat in your reception room waiting to meet a colleague?

## 8. Is the physical manifestation of the brand aligned to its values?

**Physical:** Effective brand management concerns the holistic practices of the organisation. From the design of your corporate identity to the branding of your products and services, ensure that the design aesthetic is aligned with your values and supports the vision of the brand strategy. The materials we use and the manufacturing processes we follow require choices that could undermine or strengthen our ethical stance. The offices we work in, the desks we sit at and the location we work from all test the truth behind the brand and challenge our values credentials.

# Actions

## Turning theory into action

Actions speak louder than words:

**1. Start with a big IDEA:**

How do you make the world a better place? The big concept challenges the status quo, ignores boundaries and excites the imagination. It should be something you are compelled to do and feel passionate about.

**2. Shape the future with a VISION:**

A great vision can inspire and consolidate a community in a common goal. By helping your audience to visualise what you are thinking, you make it easier for them to see their place in sharing this ideal.

**3. Identify your VALUES and really stand for something:**

Values are the corporate conscience through which performance and culture can thrive in an organisation. Values guide how an organisation behaves, they help focus on what matters most and provide a strategy for dealing with challenges.

**4. POSITIONING your brand for success:**

The aim of 'Positioning' is to place the brand at the front of consumer consciousness. If you can't lead the category, consider creating a new one. Think different!

**5. Work on your PERSONALITY:**

Branding is the personality of an organisation, product or service and can prove to be the hardest quality for competitors to emulate. An engaging personality is a strong barrier to competition.

**6. Create Brand Ambassadors with EMPLOYER BRANDING:**

Attract, retain and engage the people who will bring the brand to life and deliver great customer experiences. If your colleagues don't understand the brand, who will?

**7. BRAND IDENTITY is visible business strategy:**

You only get one chance to make a first impression. Increase your chances of success with an identity that reflects the brand strategy.

**8. Review your BRAND TOUCHPOINTS:**

A brand is only as strong as its weakest link. By examining the customer journey you will identify weaknesses and opportunities. A review of your Brand Touchpoints can initiate innovative thinking, new products and levels of customer service.



Moor Hall  
Cookham  
Maidenhead  
Berkshire, SL6 9QH  
United Kingdom

T +44 (0)1628 427500

E [info@cim.co.uk](mailto:info@cim.co.uk)

W [cim.co.uk](http://cim.co.uk)

 [@CIM\\_Exchange](https://twitter.com/CIM_Exchange)

 [facebook.com/TheCIM](https://facebook.com/TheCIM)

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