

Identifying the need for a rebrand:

# Find your brand's North Star to guide decision making.



THNK!

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[\[1\] Hubspot \(2022\)](#)

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“If you always do what you’ve always done, you’ll always get what you’ve always got.”

Henry Ford

To rebrand, or not to rebrand? It’s a decision the majority of marketing leads face at some point in their career, and it’s not one to be taken lightly.

A rebrand can have huge benefits on a business in terms of driving growth and building reputation, but it’s not always necessary. Depending on where you are as a business, a simple identity refresh to appear more modern, or a change in messaging to widen your reach could be sufficient.

**The question is, how do you know for sure?**

The problem we face as marketers is that the world has turned since 2020. As a result, it has become increasingly difficult to know if your brand is on the right path.

B2B buyer behaviour has changed irrevocably, which means your channel strategies have evolved. You may have new audiences, new services, or new expectations of how you should engage. You may also have seen your marketing and lead generation efforts plateau over the last 12-18 months.

If any of this rings true, it’s possible your B2B brand needs a reboot, whether that means a complete brand overhaul or modifications to existing communications.

To understand where the gaps are and get the right people on-board with your decision making, you need a mandate for change – an accurate picture of your business today and where you are heading.

This is your brand’s North Star.



Nike associates its products with star athletes, hoping customers will transfer their emotional attachment from the athlete to the product. For Nike, it's not just the shoe's features that sell the shoe.



When Elon Musk took over in 2008, he re-positioned Tesla as "the new technology for clean energy".



FedEx became the largest overnight shipper in the world by refocusing its positioning on delivering small packages overnight for businesses 'when it absolutely, positively has to be there overnight'.



The Apple brand in simple terms is 'brilliant design that works.' The way they deliver their keynote speeches, the videos on their website shortly before a product launch are all crystal clear in communication but designed to build anticipation around them.

## Why your brand proposition is so important

The North Star is a pin at the top of the night sky. It is the point around which all other stars seem to orbit, and travellers have used it to guide them since time began. Your brand proposition is the same principle. It is a clearly defined, relevant and well communicated statement that acts as a point of reference for everyone and everything important to your business. It ensures that each element of your brand world is fully aligned and pulling hard in the right direction, and it's just as important in the world of B2B as it is for consumer brands.

Positioning is the foundation of your brand communications strategy. Now, it is possible that your company has – somewhere in its dusty vaults – the results of some pre-existing strategy work. A document that outlines who you are, who you talk to and why they should listen. But if what you've got is older than the Mary Celeste (or you've got nothing at all), there's an excellent chance that your marketing is working on some outdated, confused, or contradictory assumptions.

Budget holders often worry about spending time and money on brand strategy work, because they don't always see how a strong brand can help you generate more leads with a better ROI. But, without a clear sense of direction, all of your marketing efforts, from PPC targeting through to the tone of your brand identity, will be inconsistent and will miss the mark with potential prospects, no matter how much money you throw at it. Often, it's this lack of clarity around a brand strategy that has the most detrimental impact on lead generation, with customers choosing competitors who have a greater understanding of their needs and position themselves more effectively to cater for them.

There are, as always, cost effective ways to get to the heart of your brand positioning. However, you get out what you put in. The more time, energy and research you commit, the more accurate your point of reference and the more effective your brand and communication decisions are.

To be clear – this is not just about putting together a snappy paragraph about your business.

Success comes from having a comprehensive understanding of the component parts that make up your brand positioning; the credible claims you can make as a business, the market differentiators that allow you to stand out and how you meet specific audience needs.

Only when you've assessed your brand positioning to see if it accurately reflects where you are as a business today, can you fine tune your marketing efforts to be more effective across your channels. Therefore defining/redefining your brand's North Star is the most important thing you can do to get your marketing efforts back on track.

Auditing all your communications against an up to date positioning can give you the confidence to make the necessary changes to your brand. It is designed to improve the relevance of your messaging, which means a better ROI from your marketing.

While it may seem overwhelming, in reality it doesn't have to be at all. In fact, it can set your brand up to generate significantly more value for many years to come.

We created this guide to help you define your brand positioning and use it to inform decision making.

Just as importantly, it will provide you with the tools and confidence you need to convince your senior management of the value of embarking on this process.

# Convince the leadership team

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“Your brand is the single most important investment you can make in your business.”

Steve Forbes

# 01

## So why is B2B branding so important? And why now?

Brand awareness matters more than ever – and the data backs it up. Brand awareness is the top priority for B2B marketers in 2022<sup>[1]</sup>, not just in the UK, but worldwide<sup>[2]</sup>.

The growing importance of strong B2B brand marketing is also reflected in the creation of a new category at the 2022 Cannes Lions festival, demonstrating global recognition of the need for creative B2B campaigns.

None of this has come about by accident. So, let's look at some of the drivers behind the new impetus for a strong B2B brand.

### 1. Our relationship with B2B customers has changed

Strong relationships are the foundation of B2B marketing. Traditionally, they have often been built on personal interactions long before money first changed hands and reinforced every time a customer visited your place of business, picked up the phone or dropped you an email.

But since the 2020 event-that-shall-not-be-named, B2B behaviour has changed irreversibly. Both buyers and sellers have shifted to digital in a massive way, with 80% of buyers now preferring remote or digital self-service<sup>[3]</sup>.

At the same time, the disruption of the last few years has encouraged buyers to search for alternative options, should their preferred seller suffer from supply chain issues or staff shortages.

The effect of this change is two-fold. Firstly, the brand equity that comes from traditional, personal interactions has begun to dwindle. And secondly, because more B2B brands are following their buyers online, it is increasingly difficult to stand out within such a crowded marketplace.

This is where brand awareness can make all the difference. Because a distinguishable, relatable brand is the only way to differentiate yourself and start building that customer relationship.

### 2. Your buyers expect a consistent brand experience

B2B buyers are just like any other consumer. They want to know that the promises you make as a brand will be kept - regardless of where or how they interact with you.

Their shift towards digital has opened up a cornucopia of new channels through which you must now ensure they can engage both reliably and conveniently.

From the Facebook ad, to your website, to remarketing via display ads, to follow-up email incentives, every touchpoint needs to offer a seamless journey that nurtures your prospect towards purchase.

This means delivering a consistent brand experience that is accessible, easy to use and instantly recognisable.

### 3. You need to reach the buyers who aren't interested yet

According to a recent report by the Ehrenberg-Bass Institute for Marketing Science, short term sales messages are irrelevant to 95% of your audience at any given time<sup>[4]</sup>.

Because companies change their B2B suppliers an average of every five years, only 20% of your target audience are in the market for your services per year, or 5% per quarter.

Brand messaging is designed to drive long-term growth, because it stays with your audience after any promotion has faded away.

A strong brand can connect on an emotional level, creating consistent memorable associations for a broader range of prospects, remaining with them until they are finally in the market.

This need for a long-term approach to marketing is another reason why you have to make sure your brand is hitting the right notes.

Without the right messaging, you will lose that golden window of opportunity when 5% of your buyers are really listening.

From Facebook ads to your website, every touchpoint should offer a seamless journey that nurtures your prospect towards a purchase.

### Did you know

Only

**20%**

of your target audience are in the market for your services per year.

#### 4. A strong B2B brand delivers long-term positive outcomes

Brand building can benefit more than just your marketing ROI<sup>[5]</sup>. In fact, according to LinkedIn's B2B Institute, there are seven key areas in which a strong B2B brand can make a tangible difference:

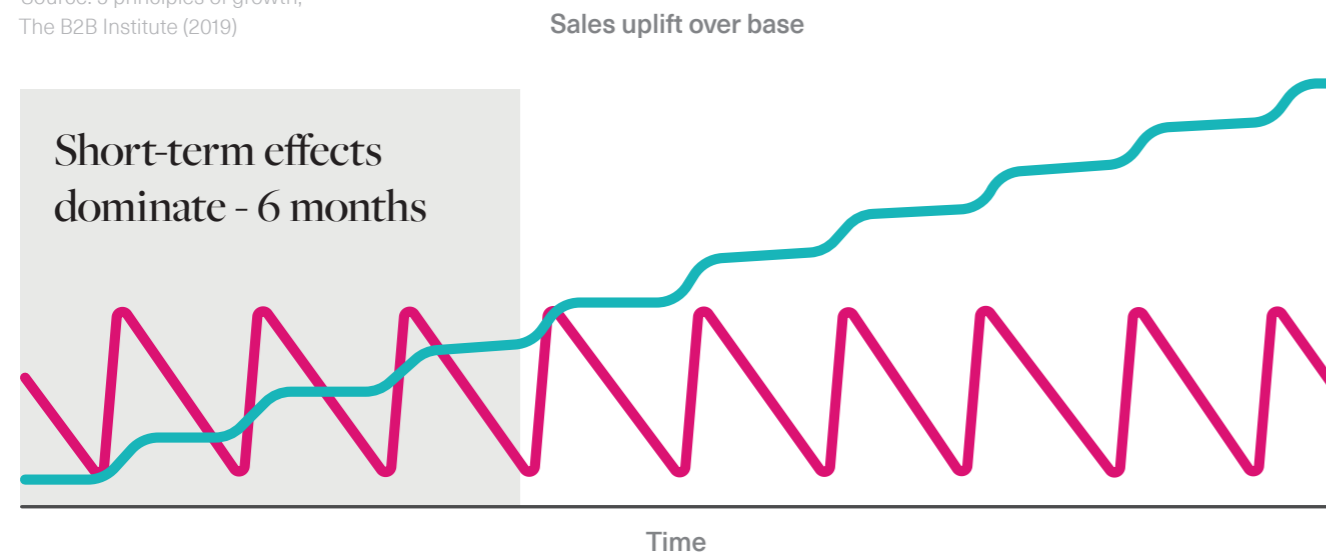
- **Short term sales** - Priming your potential buyers with brand messaging can significantly improve the performance of short-term promotions.
- **Long term sales** - By appealing to a broad audience not yet in the market for your services, you increase your future cash flow as their sales cycle comes around.
- **Reduced price sensitivity** - Strong brands can raise prices. And should you increase prices by even 1%, this can lead to a 10% boost in profitability.
- **Attracting better talent** - Employees like to work for famous companies – a strong brand helps to attract and keep them. In one study, brand messaging increased hiring response rates by 58%.
- **Identity beyond a single category** - Whichever product or service helped put you on the map, a strong brand reduces the risk of evolving your business to find the next big thing to keep you growing.
- **A legally protected and defensible identity** - Intellectual property. Two words to strike fear into the hearts of anyone thinking of mimicking your success. And yes, brands are legally protected trademarks.
- **More receptive prospects** - Just as employees like working for famous companies, prospects are more likely to take a meeting from brands that they recognise.

#### There are two types of marketing:

Short-term activation and long-term branding.

- Brand
- Activation

Source: 5 principles of growth, The B2B Institute (2019)



## Did you know

Strong brands can increase prices and it could lead to a boost in profitability of

10% ↑↑

# Get out of the starting blocks

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‘The success of your brand realignment very much depends on the continued interest and enthusiasm from your senior management. Make sure you have a plan to monitor critical KPIs, data and metrics via a single dashboard that tracks the progress of your key assets and communicate them in an easy-to-understand format.’

# 002





Let's assume that your early conversations with the C-Suite have been well received (and why wouldn't they?). Once there is an appetite to explore further and understand the extent of the challenge, where's the best place to start?

**A SWOT analysis will give you an indication of how much the business has drifted from where it wants to be, and it will form the basis of your brief.**

### 1. Conduct a SWOT analysis

The real test of your brand's existing strength comes from examining the perceptions of your clients, employees, and other stakeholders. A simple survey can do the trick. Ask some open questions about their awareness of your brand identity. What you stand for. Your brand values. If the answers all vary significantly, you can be confident that your current brand is neither well communicated nor relatable to the people that matter.

Another good indicator is comparing the answers of your customer's technical staff with the senior leadership. You would expect the former to be able to outline the technical benefits of your product or service. But if senior leaders cannot succinctly describe the broader strategic value you provide as a company, it is another sign that your brand positioning needs work.

Interviews with senior internal stakeholders should also outline the key threats and opportunities for growth and will be a rich source of information on how the current brand lines up with ambitions. It also pays to examine the main sources of new business that you have acquired over the past 12 months. If the vast majority is coming from existing relationships, then your brand messaging is not connecting with a broad enough range of prospects required for long term growth.

A SWOT analysis will give you an indication of how much the business has drifted from where it wants to be, and it will form the basis of your brief.



## 2. Build a governance team

Your next step is to meet with the key senior people the process will impact - sales, design, marketing, contact centre etc. Rebooting your brand is an exercise in change management, which means it needs complete buy-in from across the business. Treat it as the strategic decision that it is. Present the findings of your analysis along with both the benefits and risks involved in potential changes to your brand.

You are more likely to garner a positive response from the leadership team if you have included a risk management plan that accounts for obstacles that these exercises commonly face. These could include internal resistance to a change in brand identity, delays in approvals, budget constraints, schedule clashes and potentially negative customer reactions.

Then make another list of internal stakeholders who will be impacted, such as your IT department, HR, facilities, and fleet management. Be clear about your approval processes – especially about who will have final say on what.

The earlier you involve key representatives from each department, the easier the sign off process will be, as you will be able to manage any objections and concerns from the outset. However, try to keep your primary governance team to only key senior decision makers, as too many cooks can slow down or derail decision making.

This crack team will be involved in the review, feedback, and approval of each stage of the process and will provide the security you need to know that the decisions made are in the best interests of the business.

## 3. Define what success looks like

From your SWOT analysis and the feedback from your governance team, you should have a clear understanding of the challenges faced by the business and the role marketing and communications can play in solving them.

Try to consolidate this into key areas for improvement. You can start with broad objectives such as: 'increased awareness of the services we offer', 'become known as a leader in our field' or 'reach a new target audience'. But it's important that you define what succeeding in these challenges looks like. For example, will you measure web traffic to your service landing pages? Or social engagement with your blog content? Perhaps an increase in leads for a particular audience set or service? Have these 'measures of success' validated by your governance team.

The success of your brand realignment very much depends on the continued interest and enthusiasm from your senior management. Make sure you have a plan to monitor critical KPIs, data and metrics via a single dashboard that tracks the progress of your key assets and communicate them in an easy-to-understand format. This is a simple way of keeping your executive team regularly updated of progress and will ensure they remain both engaged and cooperative in the project.

# Provide the right stimulus for decision making

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‘If your SWOT has demonstrated that there are new market opportunities you are missing out on, or that you have lost market share over the last 18 months due to increased competition, it really is time to review your positioning.’

# 03

**Of course, the big question is: ‘how does our brand need to change to meet our objectives?’ But answering this requires the right point of reference. Without it, you would just be making an educated guess.**

If your SWOT has demonstrated that there are new market opportunities you are missing out on, or that you have lost market share over the last 18 months due to increased competition, it really is time to review your positioning.

Your North star reflects the direction the business wants to take now. You can then audit all elements of your brand and marketing channels to see if they still align. Does your brand identity still resonate? Does your website effectively communicate who you are now – and does it strike the right tone? Does your PPC plan accurately target all your audience segments?

We are often approached by businesses who want to refresh their website but keep the brand identity the same. However, unless they have already done so recently, in most cases we encourage our clients to re-visit their brand proposition and ask themselves if the brand they have now is reflective of where they want to be. So, before embarking on a costly redesign project, now is the time to consider alignment across all of your channels, especially your website.

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### The brand foundation model

To define a brand’s North star, we follow a simple brand foundation model which asks four important questions:

1. What can your business credibly claim?
2. What makes you different from the competition?
3. What can you say that is relevant and motivating to your target audience?
4. How might your organisation or offer change in the future, or what external market factors may impact your positioning?

Your final brand positioning lies at the intersection of these points.

**If your strategy has evolved to attracting decision makers at large-scale multinationals, there may be very little understanding of this audience within your business. Your priority should then be to address this gap before answering the question of ‘how can we be relevant and motivating?’**

These questions can be answered internally using common stakeholder assumptions, which is often a good place to start. Pose them to your leadership team and you will quickly see where the gaps in understanding are, if any. This will also outline the amount of work required to redefine your current brand positioning to be more in-line with your company's ambitions. Through these answers, you can make an educated assumption about what your positioning should be.

If you're a very small business with little time and budget, the basics can sometimes be enough. But it goes without saying that the more informed your answers, the more accurate your final positioning will be. For example, perhaps your sales team has a solid grasp of your current audience of small to medium businesses. But if your strategy has evolved to attracting decision makers at large-scale multinationals, there may be very little understanding of this audience within your business. Your priority should then be to address this gap before answering the question of 'how can we be relevant and motivating?'

We would always recommend a brand planning workshop to delve into each question in depth. You can do this yourself, but you tend to unearth more useful insight from your stakeholders if you use an agency or consultant experienced in brand workshop facilitation. For the session to go well, you (or your facilitator) should have already conducted a gap analysis to understand the level of additional research required. This provides the necessary stimulus to ignite discussion. Ask yourself: do we already have enough insight on our audience to discuss their needs in relation to our business? Do we know enough about the competition in our space?

To help you get started, let's explore questions within the brand model in more detail, as well as how you can create the answers you need to create a killer brand positioning.

## 1. Credibility

What do you actually do? It's a deceptively simple question, but it's also the most important. And it's not enough to simply list your products and services (although if you are involving 3rd parties at this stage it's a good place to start). We really want to dig into the strengths and benefits you can leverage. Why should your customers choose you? What are your values as a business? What makes you unique? Remember - any statements need to be believable and substantiated - what can we credibly claim?

You don't need much in the way of pre-research for this component. Your earlier SWOT analysis will be helpful, but you should also prepare your team with the question in advance. We have found that this is often the most vocal part of the discussion during brand planning sessions, with varying views from each stakeholder.

With each section, it's important to identify the common threads between all responses, what is emerging as a common theme/s and is there a priority?

## 2. Relevance

Robust audience research is the bedrock on which to build your brand relevance. Depending on the distribution of responsibilities in your company, you may have an intimate knowledge of your customers, you may have existing research, or it may be somewhat removed. But either way, the key is to make sure that you are not basing your understanding of your audience on a single source (i.e., you).

Your audience research should draw on quantitative and qualitative data that covers your target market, the companies within it and the people that you need to engage.

That could mean combining data compiled by third parties, such as commissioned reports, with data taken from sources such as website and social media analytics, your CRM or sales teams. It can also involve interviews with different audience groups, a focus on one specific audience, focus groups, stakeholder interviews and surveys - or a combination of different elements.

### Quantitative data examples:

- Target market size, expected growth and current awareness of your brand / product / service
- Target company revenue, location and product growth areas
- Target employees' job title, age, education and online behaviour

### Qualitative data examples:

- Target demographic motivations, fears, needs and barriers to action
- Attitudes to your existing brand and messaging
- Impressions of your company vs competitors

## Building personas

While this data is useful by itself, it becomes a far more powerful tool when you use it to build profiles of exactly the type of buyer you are targeting.

It's unlikely there is just one type of person who uses your services. Buyer personas crystallise everything you've learned into snapshots of each different ideal customer - from their level of seniority to their specific needs, behaviours, preferences and beliefs.

These are incredibly helpful for brand planning. If you don't have them already, your agency or consultant will ask for any research or common insight you have in advance of a brand planning session and use this to create 'outline' personas as stimulus for discussion. Any significant gaps in knowledge will usually need to be filled by some of the audience research activities mentioned. These activities can vary greatly depending on appetite and budget, but they are an essential part of getting the information necessary to create accurate personas. This will help improve the targeting of your brand messaging, so it aligns with the right interests, channels and types of interaction.

It is possible to move forward without audience research and rely on the picture painted by internal staff and desk research. However, without direct commentary from your current or prospective audience, you may be missing out on the nuggets of insight that will improve the relevance of your messaging and set you apart from the competition. As highlighted at the beginning, you get out what you put in.

Again, the aim will be to identify common themes in your audience's needs and motivations that will inform the positioning.

### 3. Differentiation

It's fairly likely that you already have a defined set of competitors you regularly come up against, but that's not quite enough for proper differentiation. Do some broader research. Look for businesses that may not be direct competition, but provide a similar solution to you or speak to your customers. Consider new, up and coming businesses that are not necessarily on your radar yet but are potentially going to disrupt the market.

It's important for your research to cover how each of the three types of competition appear to be positioned, their brand, their website and their marketing communications strategy across social and any other touchpoints you can access. The research can be done by yourselves or a partner, but either way, you need a clear understanding of each of these aspects before you can form an opinion on what works and what doesn't.

This research is important stimulus for your brand planning session, where visuals should be presented and discussed by the team. Your aim should be to first identify typical category conventions – and then the space that you can own yourselves.

### 4. Future stretch

Lastly, what does the future look like? This needs to address both internal and external change, so some upfront research and discussion would be beneficial.

#### Internal factors:

How could your products, services or organisation develop in the future? Will you diversify? Will you consolidate? Will you restructure? Every known quantity should be on the table at this stage, so any rebrand activity can flex with your future ambitions.

#### External factors:

Are there any consumer trends, macroeconomic factors or specific industry reports we should be taking into consideration to ensure we build a future proof brand?

## Did you know

Consistent presentation of a brand has been seen to increase revenue by

# 33%

Here's a handy way to think about your competition that's based off of Myk Pono's classification:

#### 1. Direct competitors

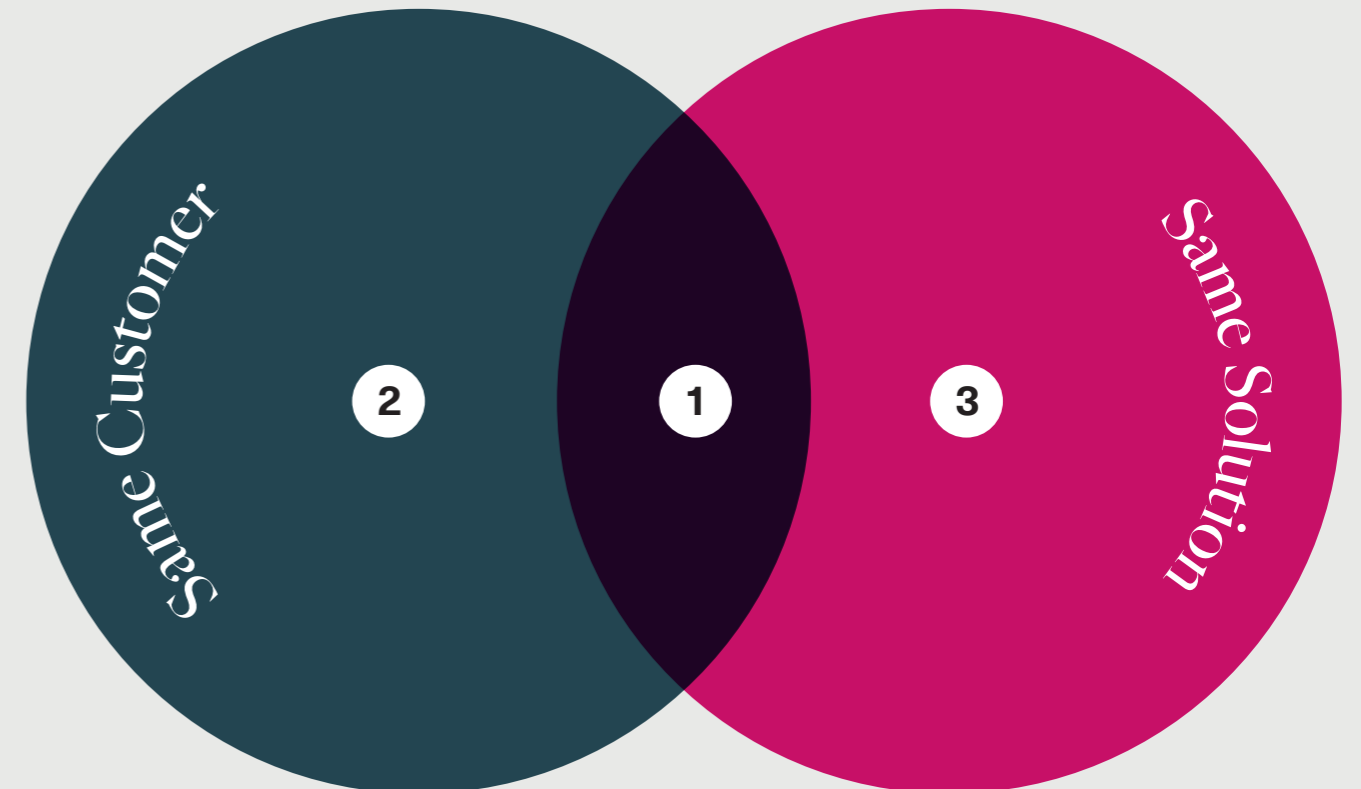
Solving the same problem for the same customer with a similar product.

#### 2. Different Solution

Solving the same problem for the same customer, but in a different way.

#### 3. Different Customer

Solving the same problem in a similar way, but for customers in a different industry/vertical.



# Define your brand proposition

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‘Your brand personality reflects the way you want to be perceived by your customers and is an essential component for being able to relate on a human level with your target audience.’

04



Technology you can count of sums up Orca's approach to supporting SMEs with their proactive approach to IT support.



A rebrand to reflect Korniche's engineering excellence. We developed a new brand positioning and consumer facing strap 'Designed Brighter'.



An industry steeped in traditional and history, Manchester Brick Specialists brand was created to reinforce the craftsmanship still used today in the production of high quality handmade bricks.



The creation of a new brand for Clearwater Growth, which was designed to be 'Hardwired for the Entrepreneur'. A single-minded strategy which spoke directly to this audience, something that competitors messaging lacked.

## 1. Create your brand proposition statement

The culmination of the brand model exercise should be the creation of a new brand proposition statement. This takes everything you have learned about your customers and defined about your company and turns it into the cornerstone of your rebrand. It defines what you stand for, what problems you solve and the benefits that make you unique.

This brand planning session should have provided enough ammunition to create a statement which is the sweet spot of all the dimensions covered. The workshop should provide you with the chance to review each section and understand the common themes and priorities before asking individuals or break out groups to put together their initial statement ideas.

This can be done in the template such as:

For...(key audience/s) who...(key audience need) we provide... (product or service) that... (key benefit).

From this point, the group can critique each statement and either choose a winner or meld together the components that resonate the most. Of course, this can be refined post-session with time to reflect. But if the session is tightly run and the right questions asked at each juncture, you should have a winning brand proposition statement that works for everyone.

## 2. Simplify as a brand essence

Now, don't panic when the resulting brand proposition statement is a rather dry, long form paragraph of copy. It is designed to accurately reflect your positioning, not to stir emotion.

If you're preparing to share the statement with people in the business who were not part of the session, creating a brand essence or short form statement can really help capture their imagination and galvanise the proposition sentiment.

If you can simplify your positioning statement into three or four words that capture your brand's purpose and value, then you have found its essence.

While this is still an internal statement at this stage, it's not uncommon for the brand essence to morph into a strap line further down the line.

**A brand proposition statement is designed to accurately reflect your positioning, not to stir emotion.**



### 3. Create your brand wheel

You now have a solid foundation for your brand. The final piece of the puzzle is to use the outcomes of the brand planning session to create a brand wheel that summarises the important components of your brand strategy, in a format that's easy to use and refer back to.

At the centre of your brand wheel is your brand essence – those three or four words designed to capture the imagination of every stakeholder within your company. Surrounding it are your brand's positioning, the benefits that you provide and the proof points that substantiate your credible claims as a business.

And on the outside are the key elements that you need to translate your brand to the people that matter.

Your audience insight section is a summary of the research, brand persons and analysis you have conducted to nail down your relevance to target audiences.

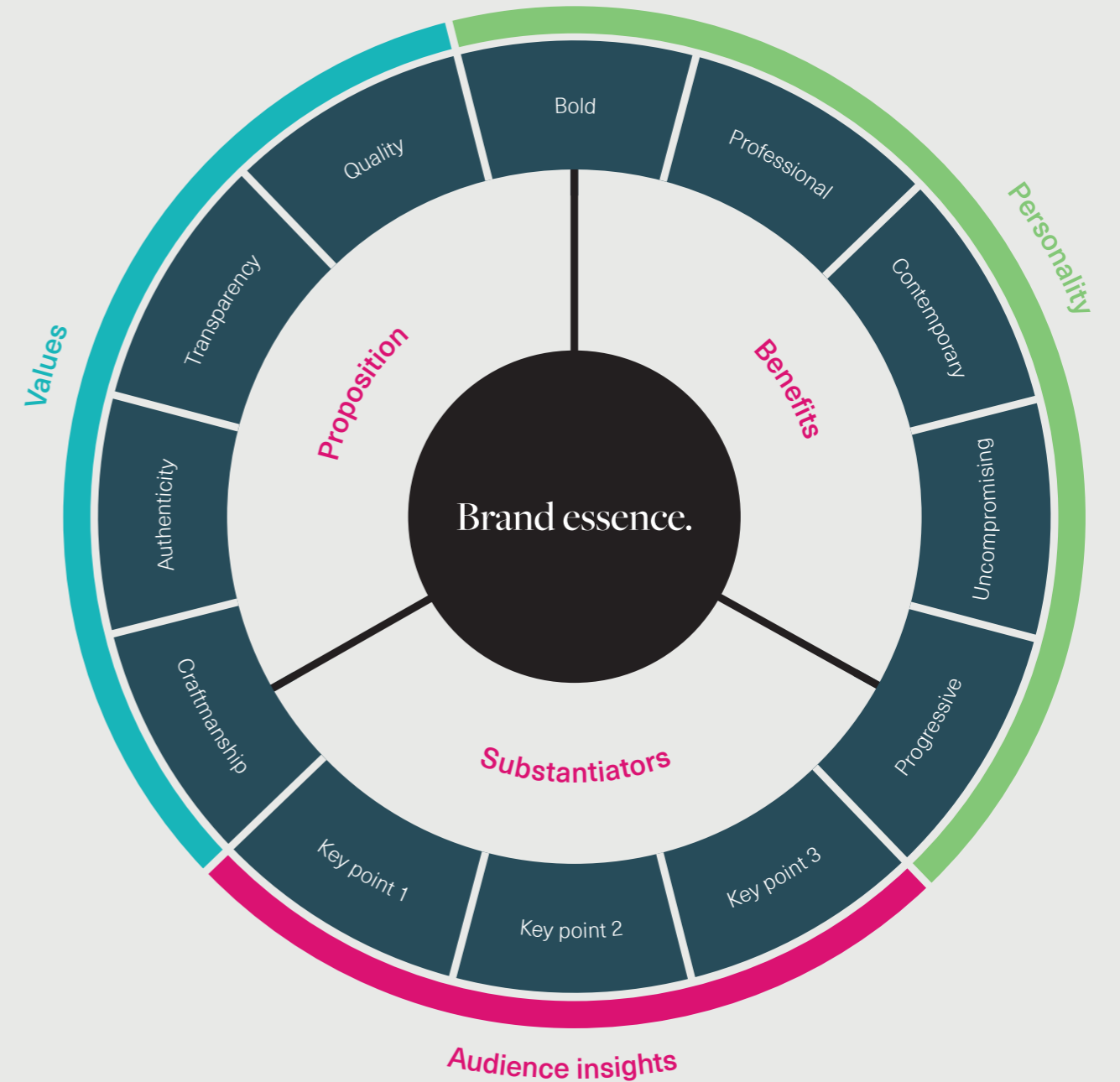
Your brand personality reflects the way you want to be perceived by your customers and is an essential component for being able to relate on a human level with your target audience. This is about bridging the gap between the concept of your brand and the people you need to engage. Make a list of the personality traits that matter to you, and those that your target audience value. Your brand personality should encompass the traits that work on both sides.

Brand values are not about what you want to achieve, but rather, what you and your company stand for. They define what you believe and how you put it into practice. Values are an essential tool for building your brand strategy because they offer a consistent reference point that you can fall back on when faced with a dilemma with no obvious right or wrong answer.

If you have brought in support from a consultant or agency, they will typically consolidate the insight and research to create the final proposition, craft your brand essence and design your brand wheel.

**While a snappy brand essence and lovely brand wheel provide a great sense of focus and direction - it's what sits behind it that counts.**

**It is the rigour of your brand planning process, informed by research and stakeholder insight, that provides a deeper understanding of your brand positioning, and that is where the real value lies.**





Experts in creating software for the commodities & energy markets sector, Brady PLC needed to reach all corners of the global trading market with a singular statement that was understood worldwide - software that helps you stay ahead of the curve.



Helping young people who had fallen out of education, Evolve Military College was positioned to help them believe in themselves, evolve and people and become the best they could be.

## Conclusion: Welcome to your North Star

Congratulations! You are now in a position to make informed decisions about your brand and what needs to change.

You can use your brand wheel and the insights you have gathered to audit your brand identity and communications - do they stack up with where your business is heading? Do they compete in the market? And are they in line with what your customers are expecting today?

Importantly, you will have engaged your key stakeholders in this process, so it will be impossible for them not to see the same opportunities as you for improving brand awareness and perception.

A crystal clear brand proposition that aligns to your business strategy will provide all the validation you need to make changes that will help the business grow, and therefore deliver maximum ROI.

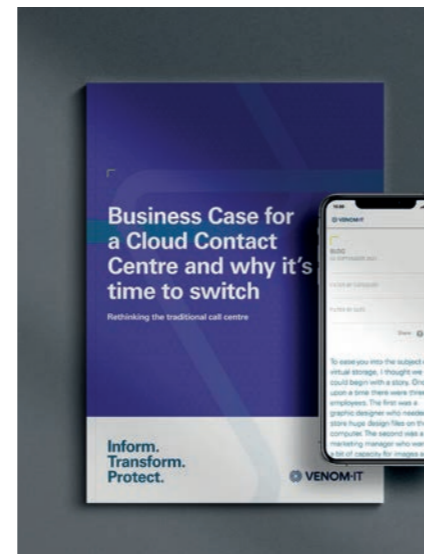
To paraphrase the Shawshank Redemption, the B2B world went and got itself in a big damn hurry. That's why brand messaging has started to take priority: It can withstand the fast-changing demands of B2B buyer audiences and deliver the kind of long-term value that promotional messages just can't achieve.

It sets your company apart in the eyes of the people who matter most, and it creates an experience that they will remember regardless of how they choose to interact.

Hopefully this guide has provided you with the tips and tools to evaluate your brand in this new reality, and helped you create a robust brand positioning you and your business can have confidence in for years to come.



DMM, world leading Welsh manufacturer of professional and sports climbing equipment simply wanted to be proud of their roots, and also encourage customers to climb now, work later.



Positioned to speak to directors of IT, the Venom brand simply reinforced their experience and know how with the statement, Inform, Transform and Protect - the 3 key pillars of a good IT infrastructure.

TH NK!

## Get in touch

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**The Drum.**  
Recommended  
Until Sep 2023