

Small brands are beautiful

Branding for small and
medium businesses



Brandmaster's practical guide

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Branding for small and medium
businesses

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Published by One Marketing Ltd.
www.one-marketing.eu

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Brandmaster



Ian West was born in Manchester, UK, and originally trained in art and design before moving to London to work as art director for paperback publisher Corgi Books. Qualifying in marketing he moved to the Midlands to start his own consultancy specialising branding and identity development with a strong international bias.

In the 1980's the business became part of a leading Midlands marketing services group with Ian taking on a number of roles over the years, including founding and running the digital marketing division, one of the first in the region. Ian has been active in new media marketing since 1990.

Now with a psychology degree under his belt also, he runs his own consultancy, One Marketing, and has concentrated over the last few years on brand and brand development, and training and personal development in a digital world. His interest in international business is undiminished and he is heavily involved in export training and the use of the internet to develop overseas business.

Ian is a passionate advocate of digital marketing and social internet and is a trainer and coach, a regular speaker and visiting lecturer. His focus is upon delivering real, measurable results – both on and off line.

For many years now, Ian has written his branding blog - <http://brandmaster.wordpress.com>, which formed the basis and stimulus for this publication.

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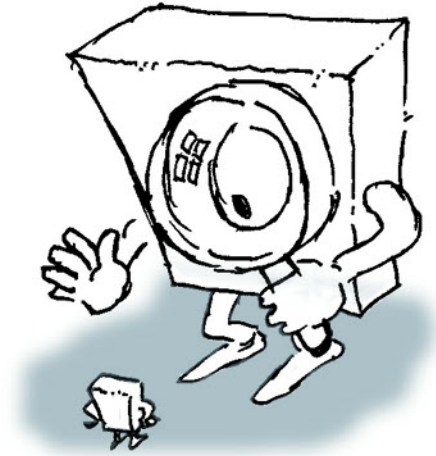
Introduction

Everyone talks about brands these days – we see brands in store, we talk about politicians having brands, even churches talk about ‘brand damage’. Brands are fundamental to businesses of all sizes. I’ve been involved with brands for most of my working life, and also spent a good deal of time helping small and medium enterprises (SMEs). However, small businesses often think branding is for the big boys, or something to leave for later when the business is up and running.

In truth, as soon as you are in business, you have a brand. It doesn’t matter if you planned it or not, the brand is there. Whether it is Bill’s Window Cleaning, Portsmouth Pressings or Creative Catering – it is a brand. In time it may well become one of your most valuable assets.

This book is designed for SMEs. To help you understand your brand, know how to build it, plan it, nurture and protect it and grow it into something of real value. It’s also about how small brands have some real advantages over their big brothers and sisters, and how you can capitalise upon that competitive edge.

So, what is beautiful about small brands?



To start with, there is clarity of the offer. For big brands, it is often like Chinese whispers where the management may have one view of what the brand stands for, but by the time the message filters down to a sales assistant in a store or a service engineer 300 miles from head office – well, that message can get diluted and confused with the result that the customer is associating the brand with a very different offer. For small brands those lines of communication are very short.

Similarly, if the lines of communication downwards are short for small brands – so are those coming back upwards. Customer feedback is fast. Provided the management have their ears open they can deal with any issues quickly, maintaining brand values and credibility.

That brings us to the next advantage of small brands – quick reflexes. I've worked a lot with some of the world's biggest brands and if there is an issue, it can take a long time to filter up to those who can pull the necessary levers. Once they hear the message, they have to decide what to do. Now, that may not be an easy decision. Sales may be down, customers may be abandoning the brand – but exactly why? The reasons are not always obvious, so there may have to be a lengthy research stage. Remember these are multi-million brands – it is right for the company to be very cautious before making changes. After the research, an action plan needs to be created and the resources earmarked to carry it out. For a big international brand operating across continents this can be a lengthy and costly exercise.

While the big brand is going through all of that – you get instant feedback from your customer or salesman. Identify the issue and best course of action and do it. You are close enough to both your business and the customer. Obviously this is a small business benefit in many fields, but in branding it helps you punch way above your weight and leave the big brands reeling.

As you see, big brands don't have it all their own way. A recent survey by Iris, commented upon in *Marketing Week*, suggests that consumers are looking to smaller brands that they see as representing better quality and they feel better able to trust.

Of course the big brands still feature highly, but interestingly in a recession, consumers seem more prepared to pay a premium price for brands they see as embodying the right values.

One example cited by Mary Lou Costa in her excellent article is that of Virgin: *"Other surprises come from the travel and technology sectors. In travel, 38% of people say they would be willing to pay a premium for a Virgin Atlantic flight, while just 28% say the same for a British Airways flight. While Virgin Atlantic is not necessarily only a premium airline, its marketing portrays a fun, forward-thinking company that offers an enjoyable, relaxed experience."*

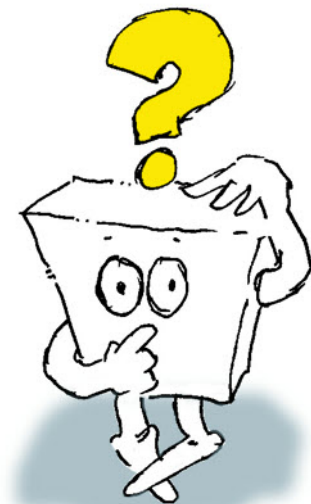
It's back to those old emotional values and attachments, and all of this is good news for the small brands. However, it should also be a wake up call for big brands. I would suggest that one reason why Virgin scored over BA, despite being a big player is that it acts more like a small brand.

The brand can capitalise upon this, as in Virgin's move into retail banking – perhaps if it can continue to express and live up to these values it can justify a position against the major retail banks. For the smaller brands however, the high ground is there to be won.

With a differentiated offer and clear set of values, David can still give Goliath a run for his money.

Section 1 – all about the brand

What is a brand?



Brands are often confused with names and logos, and all these have a part to play, but fundamentally a brand is about what an organization actually ‘is’, what it does and the values it stands for.

Let’s imagine that way back in the past there was a blacksmith called Jack. Jack makes really good axes and people talk about Jack’s axes. And there it is: he had a brand. Jack did nothing apart from make good axes – he didn’t make ‘a brand’. The brand emerged. So, as soon as you start making or selling something or delivering a service, you have a brand – it is created by the world around you and your interaction with it. People associate certain values and qualities with your brand – maybe sharpness and long life for Jack’s products.

Suppose Jack's axes were so good that other people started passing off their axes as Jack's. Then Jack might make a distinctive punch with which to mark his axes with a decorative 'J'. Now he has a brand mark or a logo.



How brands work

Why is brand planning important for small and medium businesses?



One topic that always crops up in our brand development coaching workshops with small and medium businesses is the need to think strategically about their brands – and this may often mean doing less.

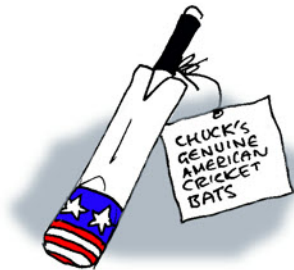
First let's consider the name – the corporate signature to give it its fancy title. When setting up a business there are a thousand things to think about, and the name is low on that list. So we tend to just say it like it is – 'Anytown Plumbing Services', for instance. That has a lot going for it – it says what the business does and where it is: but things change. Let's imagine that the heating side of the business takes off: we move into selling gas fires and that leads us into fireplaces and we open a showroom in big city down the road. All of a sudden the name seems less suitable. We are then faced with the quandary – do we change the name and write off all the investment and goodwill the brand carries, or perhaps create a second brand for fireplaces with all the hard work and investment needed to support a new brand?

The message is that we can't foresee the future, so keep the options open. Of course it's important in the early days to let potential customers know what we do, but far better to do that with a strapline or brand purpose statement such as 'ABC Ltd – local, reliable plumbing and heating services'. The strapline can change easily while leaving the brand name untouched.

What's in a name?

Don't worry too much about the name. Remember it is just an icon symbolising what you do and what your brand stands for – it is the values that are the important things. McDonalds, Apple, Ford, Kraft and Gucci, as names, don't mean anything in themselves – their value lies in the association with the organizations behind them. Sure, if you can come up with a catchy, memorable name it may aid recall – and that is great, but don't batter your head against the wall trying to dream one up – better spend the time focusing on your offer.

When thinking strategically it may be a good time to consider what your long term aim is – do you want to build a business to sell it? If so, ask yourself the question whether it is a good idea to have your name over the door. Fred Smith Ltd may lose a lot of its value if Fred Smith is no longer there.



Spend a little time thinking globally too. The world presents massive opportunities to do business outside your own country – the web has made it easier than ever to exploit these possibilities. So look at whether your brand will be appropriate to other markets. Does reference to your home market help (The US baseball Co, English Teas Ltd) or will it be a hindrance? Does your name translate into other languages without

meaning something inappropriate? Do your corporate colours have positive or negative connotations in export markets?

We all have a lot on our minds when running small and medium businesses and often it is as much as we can do to deal with the day-to-day issues right in front of us. However, spending a little time to think strategically about your brand can save a lot of confusion and reactive stress in the future. One simple thing you can do is just to consider some point in the future – say three to five years away – and imagine where you would like your business to be. Don't hold back, be as ambitious as you want – think big! Then look at your brand – will it suit where you want to be?

If your brand does not match your ambitions for your business at that point in the future, start planning for change now. That way, change can be evolutionary not revolutionary. A gradual development will let you change without damaging all the effort and investment you have put behind your brand to date.

When a new business brand appears, it quickly goes through a couple of stages. Firstly, there is the awareness stage as customers and the world in general spot a new kid on the block. Whether the new business owner planned it or not – a new brand exists. The world may not know much about what it is, what it does or what it stands for, but it is there.

Next it goes through the 'knowledge' stage, as people begin to learn more about it, either through formal communications, word of mouth or empirically through direct contact. But this knowledge is not cold, dead facts – it is dynamic, thanks to attribution. People attribute values to knowledge/actions – and the same action can have positive or negative attributions based upon the decisions they made about the brand in their initial awareness stage (the 'Halo Effect'). The very first experiences people have of your brand can be critically important to your success.

Let's look at an example: you have started a new job and in your team is Miss A and Miss B. You take an immediate liking to Miss A and an instant dislike of Miss B.

You are working hard on a difficult task and Miss A looks over your shoulder and points something out and says; 'I think you have gone wrong there. The result should be X'.

You think to yourself; 'Thank goodness she pointed that out, I might have got into trouble there. She is a useful friend to have.'

Alternatively, Miss B may come over and say; 'I think you have gone wrong there. The result should be X'.

You think to yourself; 'Damn her! She has just been waiting for me to make a mistake so she could show me up!' Both said the same thing and made precisely the same action, but you gave each a different attribution.



The same goes for brands – the same action by two brands can have very different attributions, dependent upon the judgement that was made in the earliest stages of awareness. An innovative recycling scheme that may be seen as sensitive and pioneering by one brand, may be attributed as being a cynical smokescreen by another.

The important factor is the emotional attachment the audience makes in those first awareness encounters. All too often branding is not considered a major or important issue in new business or

product launches. There are far more 'important' things on the agenda such as delivery, pricing and production, and although the value of branding may be recognised it is often thought that it can be dealt with later. But if a brand is allowed to leak out into the market without planning that critical opportunity to make a positive statement may be lost. Future attributions may be negative in the eyes of many despite all the good intentions of the owners. We don't get a second chance to make a good first impression.

Section 2 – Building your brand

In this section we will look at how you can put the theory into practice to create, manage and build your brand.

Asses your brand strengths

As you have gathered if you have read this far, I maintain that the most important resources are your brand values so it is important to begin by looking inside: what are your strengths? What are the core competences that make your business and your brand special?

This is a strengths and weaknesses exercise, but for now concentrate on the strengths. Here are some things to look for:

- History – how long have you been trading? Where did you start from? What about your founder(s) – where did they come from, is there a story there? (Think of Kellogg and Branson).
- Unique technologies or processes. What intellectual properties do you have?
- Management strengths – experience, commitment, skills, reputation, and profile – don't be shy about blowing your own trumpet.
- Workforce strengths – size, experience, qualifications – talk up your people.
- Cost base.
- Location – national or local strengths.
- Size – large or small, it can be a strength.
- Accreditations – ISO, BSI, MOD, CE etc.

- Logistics – stocking, delivery, response ability.
- References – major clients/customers, projects completed.

... and whatever other key strengths you recognise . Make a note right now:

My brand strengths are:

Identify your audiences

The most important point you have to be clear about is exactly who your brand is talking to. The chances are you may have more than one audience – perhaps your end-user, but also others along the supply chain, maybe distributors or agents, or influencers who make referrals.

A great tool in getting a clear view of your brand audiences is to use personas. Remember it is people not companies who make decisions. It is also people who are influenced by your brand values. So there is little point saying that your audience is; ‘Small engineering companies’, when actually it is, ‘design engineers in small engineering companies’.

But even that may be a bit woolly. You will often hear consumer marketers using socio-demographic terms to define audiences such as: ‘B/C1 male 25-35’. That’s all a bit anonymous though.

When I worked as an advertising copywriter, a very experienced creative director advised me that when writing copy first think of somebody you know who fits that audience profile – perhaps a relative, workmate or friend. Then write as though you are talking directly to them – perhaps your Aunt Mary or Jim at the football club. That will help you use the right voice and tell them what they want to hear.

I strongly advise you to do the same for your brand. For each of your audiences create a persona. Give the persona a name or a title – maybe ‘Geoff’, ‘Lucy’ or ‘Essex man’. In Obama’s presidential campaign he identified a number of personas his brand had to appeal to, including ‘NASCAR Dad’ and ‘Security Mom’.

Next, create a ‘lifestyle board’ for each persona. Cut pictures from magazines or from the web. Find someone who you think looks like the persona, and collect pictures of their home, car, clothes etc. Then choose logos of the other brands they might choose and stick these on the board. This last one is very important as it gives you an

idea of the values of other brands your audiences are likely to choose and who your brand must sit alongside.

Remember this is equally applicable to business-to-business as it is for business-to-consumer, though in B2B you also need to look at business lifestyle of personas. Does 'Frank' the chief accountant choose KPMG, travel first-class and carry an iPad? Write down your personas below:

Persona 1
Nickname:
Description:

Persona 2
Nickname:
Description:

Return to your brand strengths.

Now you know who you are talking to, return to your brand strengths and asses which of those values are most important to your audiences. It may be the same strengths for each audience, or for some of your targets certain brand values will be more important than others. Rank your strengths to reflect which will matter most to each of your personas.

Brand Strengths	Rank importance to persona 1 (1-3)	Rank importance to persona 2 (1-3)

Consider your competitors.

Identify competitive brands, look at their brand strengths and compare them to yours for each of your personas. What you should be looking for are points of differentiation. Why should someone choose you and not them?

Create a brand proposition.

Your brand proposition or brand promise is all about what differentiates you from other brands and why somebody should choose your brand. Try to encapsulate this in a couple of sentences – include the following points:

- What you offer and what is special about it.
- What is special or different about your organization?
- The real benefit someone will get from choosing your brand (remember ‘benefit’ not features).
- The evidence to support your claim (reference sites, history, awards, accreditations etc.)

You have probably heard the term ‘elevator pitch’. This suggests that you should be able to tell a complete stranger what your brand is, what it does and why he or she should consider buying it – it is your brand proposition, in effect.

Write your brand proposition here:

People will choose my brand because:

Planning and brand strategy.

We have already discussed the value of planning your brand and you should now have a clear picture of your brand proposition and you strengths. Now let's look at building on that in practical terms.

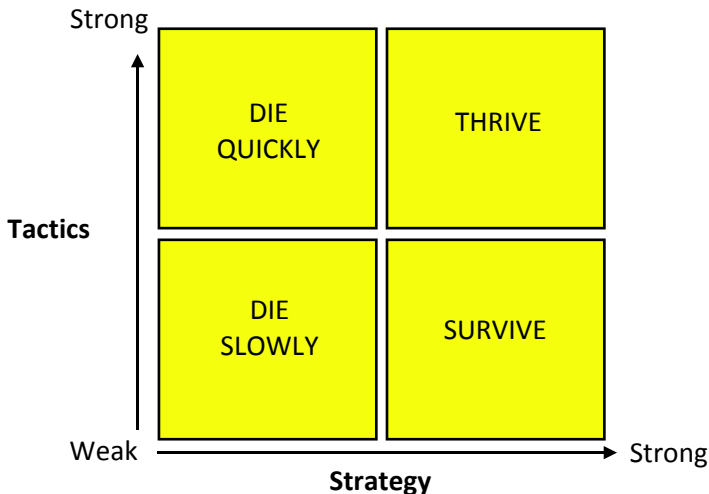
First let's make sure we understand the difference between strategy and tactics. Strategy is about identifying a big objective and they way to get to it. Tactics are all the smaller tasks you have to accomplish along the way to getting there.

If you have a clear and sound brand objective and strong tactics, you will thrive.

If your brand strategy is strong but your tactics are weak, the brand should still survive because you are heading in the right direction, it will just take you longer to get there.

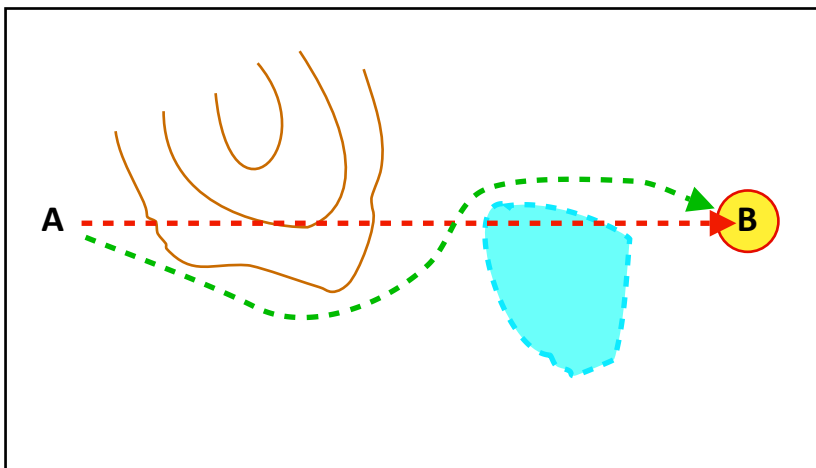
If your strategy is weak but your tactics are strong, the brand will probably die quickly – you are doing the wrong things, but doing them well!

If both your strategy and tactics are weak, the brand will probably die but slowly and painfully as it will take a long time to realise.



Your brand strategy does not need to be a weighty document: one side of A4 should be more than enough. It's all about setting that clear objective. I recommend that you take a point a reasonable way in the future – say two or three years, and decide where you want your brand to be at that point in time. I say pick a date a good way away because things are sure to be turbulent and change a lot within the next 12 months or so. For smaller businesses external effects can be very dramatic: you may win a big order from an unexpected quarter, new legislation may present a threat or an opportunity, or a big customer may disappear. So you can very likely be a long way off the path to your objective at the end of 12 months, but so long as your goal is in sight you can make corrections.

Suppose you are going for a walk, from A to B: you know where you are starting from (A) and you know where your objective is (B). But you don't walk in a straight line (the red line). You are likely to come across obstacles. First there is a hill, then a lake. So, you have to change course, and your likely path may be more like the green line. By point (1) you are way off course to the South, and by point (2) you are way off to the North. But, so long as you are clear where your big objective (B) is you keep amending your course and get there.



Knowing your objective is your strategic plan; changes in the route to negotiate obstacles are tactical decisions.

As you can see, the key is setting your brand objective. One tried and tested method is using **SMART** objective setting. Okay, it's been around for years and most of you are probably familiar with it, but it is still a valuable tool for setting objectives for colleagues, staff, suppliers... and yourself. For those of you not familiar with it, or those of us who have not used it in a while, it is a very useful mnemonic:

S – *Specific: clear, precise, not fuzzy.*

M – *Measurable: You need measures in there to measure the success or otherwise of the project. Success criteria and failure criteria.*

A – *Achievable: All goals and objectives should be challenging, but if they are not achievable, those involved in the project will either become disheartened or you will start moving the goal-posts.*

R – *Realistic: People often used to ask what is the difference between 'realistic' and 'achievable' – well, we bring in the other 'R' – Resource. Is there sufficient resource (time, personnel, cash etc.) to realistically achieve the objective within all the other parameters?*

T – *Time based: We all know we need a timescale otherwise things don't happen.*

These five factors can form the structure around which to hang your brand strategy, but they are critical. They are tools of the brief-writer, but should involve consultation. Two of the factors may be variable – **M**, the measures and **T**, the timescale. You may need to manipulate these for **A**, achievable and **R**, realistic to work. It is far better to get this right at the brief stage than have to go back and change the objectives as the project is in progress.

You should be able to encompass your smart objective in one or two sentences, for example:

“Our brand will have 10% of the XXX market at home and 3% of the European market by 2015”

“Our brand will be listed in four major supermarkets, including ABC and DEF, by 2017”

“We will identify 500 potential clients, and raise our unprompted brand awareness to 20% across that group by 2015”

“Our customer survey tells us they rate us 8 out of 10 for product quality, but only 5 out of 10 for customer service (the same as our competitors). By 2016 we will gain competitive advantage by increasing our customer service rating to 8 out of 10”

Write your SMART brand objective below; making sure it is ‘SMART’:

Our 'SMART' brand objective is:

Your brand identity

Your brand identity has two components – the brand personality, what your brand actually is, what it stands for and what its values are, and the brand communication or visual identity, logos, colours, brand assets etc.

Brand personality

So far as your brand personality is concerned, start with looking at the brand proposition you created earlier. Within that you should see your key brand values. It's what differentiates your brand from the competition.

Now it's important to see that as a brand personality. A useful way to do this is to consider a brand persona, just as you did when looking at personas for your target audiences. This is often called the 'brand as person' model and not only describes the persona, but also the audience's relationships with them.

Some examples of the types of the brand-as-person model and the types of relationship you might have with people sharing those relationships are described over the page:

Type	Characteristics	Example brands	Relationship model
Conservative	Trustworthy, old-fashioned, sincere	Marks and Spencer, AGA, Kodak, Guinness	Like that with a respected member of the family
Exciting	Fashionable, outgoing, young, fun	GAP, Virgin, Mini, Red Bull	Like the sort of person you would like to spend an evening or weekend with
Competent	Accomplished, able skilled, influential	Financial Times, BBC, IBM, Volvo	The relationship with a teacher or business leader
Sophisticated	Wealthy, stylish, pretentious	Mercedes, Harvey Nichols, Vogue, Mont Blanc	The relationship with a wealthy relative, or a powerful boss

One way of looking at this is to consider what the brand would think of you, or as Max Blackstone asked, ‘how would the brand talk to you?’ Would it support you, be sympathetic, applaud your good taste, talk down to you, or intimidate you?

Fred Posner talked about the brand as a friend, or as a trusted or aspirational associate. Such a relationship can be the basis of real differentiation and competitive advantage.

So, let's try to get to grips with your brand personality. From your brand proposition try to identify at least three but no more than six words to describe the brand personality that is contained in your proposition. For a start-up in the IT field it may be:

- Cutting edge
- Energetic
- Flexible
- Surprising
- Fun

An established engineering company with ambitions in export markets, it may be:

- Established
- Reliable
- International
- Fast moving
- Pioneering

Write your brand values here:

My brand values are:

Now for the brand persona – what type of person would you see your brand as being? No need to give them a name, your brand already has one, but describe the sort of person:

“A close friend who is fun to go out with but I know I can rely upon”

“A trusted, conservative, older advisor who I look to for dependable, non-risky advice”

“An exciting, artistic if somewhat dangerous friend. I feel uninhibited to be with them”

“A precise, painstaking if somewhat fussy artisan with obsessive attention to detail”

Write your brand persona here:

My brand persona is:

Visual identity

If you already have an established brand with a visual identity you may want to skip this section, but I strongly recommend a reality check here. Look at your brand values and brand persona above, and then look at your visual identity. Does it fit? Does it match? If it does: great! If not, then you have some hard decisions to make.

We mentioned earlier creating ‘lifestyle boards’ for each of your audiences and suggested assembling the logos of other brands that your audience might buy: these are not competitors but general

products. For example, your target consumer might also drive a Ford car, read the Guardian, shop at Marks & Spencer and Waitrose, have an iPhone, stop at Holiday Inns etc. Collect logos and printed material from all those brands and then place yours' in the middle of them. How does it look, comfortable? If not, you have a great starting point to build your brand's look.

Evolution or revolution?

In most cases you won't be beginning with a completely blank slate, you will probably have a brand name at least, and maybe a logo or a colour scheme. If you have decided it needs some attention, the big decision is whether to start completely fresh, or build on the good points of what you have.

Completely changing a brand identity is a big step and not one to be taken lightly. Every identity has some currency – you have made investment in it and it will certainly have some recognition value, even if it has only been in business a matter of months. Some reasons for making a major change may include:

- Confusion with a competitors' brand
- Potential infringement of intellectual property rights
- Inappropriate for new export market
- Poor visibility in the marketplace
- Out of fashion, in a market where fashion is important.

More usually, it will be evolutionary change that is required. First be clear of what it is you are trying to achieve by changing. Try first to write down how you want the brand to look – then write down how you think it looks now. Then pick apart the brand into its elements: logo/brand mark, brand name, colours, typography, backgrounds and any other visual assets. Then consider which of these elements have value and would contribute positively to the desired appearance, and which ones need attention. That way you can

upgrade your visual appearance while still maintaining the points that are important for continuity and recognition.

Most major brand identities are in a constant evolution, but they make changes step by step so their audiences are never shocked or surprised. Classic examples are Shell, Marks and Spencer, and Coca-Cola. We can all apply their techniques to our own, more humble brands.

Got a clean slate?

So, what if you are starting from scratch? Well, it's a great opportunity to get things right from the start, but it can be pretty daunting beginning with a blank sheet of paper – where do you begin? Well, you already have your starting point – it is the work you did in the previous section. Return to your brand proposition, your audiences and brand personality. Your visual identity should fit with them – use them as a measure of how well your brand identity stacks up.

Brand names and symbols.

We touched on names right at the start. Maybe you already have one. If not, where do we begin? Well there are any number of approaches, here are just a few to get you started.:

- Personal names – founders owners etc. (Ford, Kellogg's, Sainsbury)
- Locations – countries, towns, real and imaginary places. These can be relevant to where your brand is situated, or reflect certain values e.g. Manhattan, Monte Carlo etc.
- Natural world – animals, plants, geographic features. Generally those with attributes that reflect your brand. For example: lion – brave, oak – strong, eagle – noble, squirrel – provident. Or just as creative irrelevancies e.g. Apple, Daisy, Cherry.

- Artefacts – ‘shield’ or ‘fortress’ for security or protection, ‘key’ for answers or solutions. ‘Crown’ or ‘star’ for quality.
- Initials – from founders or perhaps historical company name – BMW, AT&T, IBM
- Abstractions – abstract names allow flexibility to go into wider markets, can be memorable and maybe easier to trademark. Persil, Snickers, Cif.

Symbols

Do you need a symbol? Well, a name with a distinctive typographic style is often enough but symbols do have their uses. Once established they provide a visual shorthand – you have only to see the golden arches, the three-pointed star in a circle, or the yellow shell to know who the brand is behind them and what values they stand for. It may take considerable time however for that recognition to take place.

Symbols were traditionally more important in the retail sector where outlets or packs on the shelf need to be quickly recognised. However, with the growth of Internet, mobile communications and video (YouTube), communications are becoming increasingly visual, so symbols are becoming more important even for B2B brands.

Where do you start with symbols? Many of the starting points outlined for names are appropriate, but you may also consider:

- History and background – for example, BMW originally made aero-engines, so their symbol is based upon a spinning propeller.
- Natural world – as in ‘names’ above. Red Bull or the Lacoste crocodile.
- Artefacts - as in ‘names’ above, or relevant to the business; perhaps a plane for cabinet makers, or an aerial for a radio station.

- Initials – formed into logos or ciphers.
- Heraldry – great to create a sense of history, tradition or location. Brands often create their own pseudo-coats of arms.
- Flags – national or local, maritime or invented.
- Visual expressions of the name – e.g. Shell or Apple
- Creative irrelevancies – the Bovis hummingbird or the Dulux dog.

Colours

Colours are very emotive. Choose them with care. Also consider visibility – it is obvious to say that yellow text on a white background is hard to read, but many equally damaging choices are made.

Also check out how your colours look in black and white (or greyscale). You won't always have colour at your disposal.

Remember that colours have different significance in different cultures. For example, red, means good luck in China, in India it signifies purity, in South Africa it may be the colour of mourning, in many eastern countries it is worn by brides where in the West it signifies danger and excitement. Check out colour meanings if you have ambitions to do business overseas. There is plenty of information on the Internet.

Research and check.

- Check that your name or symbol has not been registered or used by somebody else in your sector. www.ipo.gov.uk
- Check that your name does not mean something unintended. Ask friends and colleagues their opinion, sometimes you can be too close to see obvious gaffs.
- Check that your name is easy to pronounce, without confusion, on the phone, in videos etc.
- Check that your name does not mean something inappropriate in the languages of markets you may want to enter at some point in the future.
- Check that suitable URLs are available.
- Check that your graphics, name, symbol, typography work in all possible applications. In print, on screen and at all possible sizes.

Consistency

The best brand identities are not necessarily the best designed, but they are the best policed. If you encounter, say, a McDonalds outlet anywhere in the world, you can guarantee that the logo and corporate signature will always be the same. Exactly the same red and yellow will be used.

Major brands have identity manuals heavy enough to kill a small rodent, detailing every aspect of their visual standards. We don't need that, but we do need to document a few key details.

First, make sure that you have some master images for your symbols or logos – you may need a colour and B/W version. You may need a few sizes and resolutions applicable to various applications – e.g. on screen or in print.

Then, on a single page, specify what your brand typefaces are (primary and secondary at least). Also list your brand colours – use Pantone colours, RGB or Hex – or all that you can access. There is nothing worse than having somebody try to match a print colour from your website on a badly adjusted monitor.

On the same sheet make a note of any important points. Perhaps a minimum font size you find acceptable, or space around your logo.

Put your images and the text page into a folder, and there you have you 'Brand Visual Standards Manual' (sounds impressive doesn't it?) All you need do now is to pass that to anyone who is working on your brand collateral – graphic designers, web developers, packaging companies, signwriters, vehicle graphics producers, video companies – tell them to follow that on pain of death. That way you can ensure a basic measure of consistency across your brand identity.

Brand leadership

A brand needs a champion. It is one of a company's potentially most valuable assets, so it should be at the very core of the business. Everything the organization does, in its operations, sales, customer service, recruitment, financial dealings, marketing and communications, ultimately impacts upon the brand. Whenever decisions are made on any of these aspects, the question should be asked: "What effect will this have on the brand?"

If the brand does not have a strong champion (and for SMEs this usually means the CEO or owner) it will lose direction. The values and vision of the organisation should be those of the brand, and should be set by the board or the owner.

