How to build a successful brand identity

A brand is the sum of how a person, product, or business is viewed by its audience and/or customers. Brand identity is how a business wants to be viewed. These two ideas often go hand in hand, but can sometimes be at odds, depending on how well a brand is able to cultivate and maintain its brand identity.

Below are seven elements you'll need to build a brand identity your audience will love:

☐ Establish a clear purpose and position

The first part of establishing a brand identity is determining your purpose and goals. Brand purpose is the 'why?' behind everything you do. Why does my brand exist? Why is my product or service better than the competition? Why does our brand look/feel/communicate the way it does?

For a great example of a succinct, tangible corporate purpose, check out this statement from Apple:

> *"Apple's 100,000 employees are dedicated to making the best products on earth, and to leaving the world better than we found it."*

You'll also want to spend some time thinking about brand positioning, or the unique value that your brand brings your audience. Think of this as your brand's 'elevator pitch'. All the work done here will inform your strategy as you create a logo, decide on a color palette, etc.

Zooming out, brand positioning is the process of making your purpose actionable. By naming your target customer and differentiating yourself from the competition, you'll lay the groundwork for your brand to accomplish your purpose.

☐ Conduct thorough market research

A brand's purpose and positioning can (and should be) informed, at least in part, by market and customer research. Research is crucial to understand the "cultural tension" described in the previous section. For beginners to market research, there's a wealth of content online to help get you started.

Oftentimes, one of the best ways to conduct market research is to simply talk to a lot of people. For example, phone interviews allow your teams to have detailed, human-driven discussions with your customers – something that could be helpful if you want to appeal emotionally to your audience.

Beyond phone interviews, online survey tools, like Survey Monkey, are a fast way to gather a lot of information. Don't forget to look into available government resources too, like this helpful toolkit from the US Small Business Association.

Good market research can also help you determine your main customer personas, a term that is a slightly different concept than "target customers." Your customer persona(s) go beyond just defining what problem a customer has; it delves into the nitty gritty details behind your focus customers' professional and personal traits. Defining these traits will help you know what kind of personality your brand should have to appeal to customers, which brings us to our next point.

☐ Craft a loveable brand personality

"If your brand were a person, what would they be like?" It might be a bit cliché, but this is a smart way to think about brand personality.

If you get your brand's personality right, it will shine through in every part of your brand identity. Brand personality greatly impacts the voice and tone used in your marketing materials and other communications. Why is this important? Your customers will get mixed messages if your brand's personality isn't well established, and they may have trouble connecting emotionally with your brand.

If you're having difficulty getting started, here's an exercise to try: Which celebrities or fictional characters best represent your brand? Is there an actor, actress, musician, or public personality that embodies the same traits as your brand? This could be a good starting point for nailing down different aspects of your brand's personality.

Once you've pictured the kind of person your brand would be and listed off a few attributes they have, it's helpful to think about how your brand will come to life through your voice and tone.

☐ Make a memorable logo

Your logo is central to your brand identity design. It's the piece of your brand identity that most people will be exposed to. It needs to line up with all the other elements of your brand identity and the broader emotional appeal of your brand.

A few guidelines Marq CEO, Owen Fuller suggests on making a logo with an impact:

1. Make it memorable. *Are there unique elements/colors/etc that make it stand out?*
2. Make it simple. *Can a 3rd grader draw it?*
3. Make it versatile. *Can you apply it across multiple mediums and channels?*
4. Make it evocative. *Does it make you something?*
5. Make it timeless. *Will it work as your brand grows?*

A memorable brand is often the simplest brand. Take a look at the logos of the world's top 3 brands (according to Kantar):
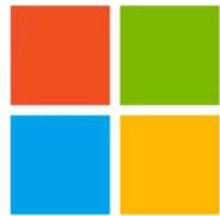
What do all three have in common? Intentionality in color, design, and simplicity. And speaking of simplicity, a simple logo makes it easier to apply to different mediums. Whether you're designing for a product, digital marketing, or print, designing with every channel in mind will ensure a successful logo development from the very start.

☐ **Choose an attractive color palette**

Evocative and full of emotional potential, your brand colors are often just as memorable as the logo design. Consider looking into the dynamics of color theory when choosing the palette that best represents your brand.

A lot of color psychology is intuitive, like blue expressing calm and red and yellow expressing passion and energy. Depending on the tint or shade of a color you use, that emotion can be adjusted. A tint is a color mixed with white, making it lighter, and a shade is a color mixed with black, making it darker. A lighter tint of blue conveys tranquility, while a darker shade of blue often conveys trust, an effect that many banks use in their color schemes.

Be aware though that color connotations can differ wildly between cultures. For example, while yellow is often seen as a bright, happy color in the US, it is linked with mourning and death in places like Latin America and Egypt. If your brand plans to do business internationally, it's important to double-check that the colors you want to use don't have any unintended meanings.

When it comes to creating a workable color palette, designers should select a set of primary and secondary colors to be used for specific purposes. Staying consistent with this palette is key – the more you use it in the same way, the more you'll be able to build brand equity over time.

A few more considerations for picking a great color scheme:

- Make sure your palette has enough contrast when paired with text. This ensures all your marketing materials are easy to read and accessible. Use this tool to double-check your palette.
- Double-check that your palette reinforces the emotions you want to evoke. If your brand is all about health and well-being, strong colors like burgundy or magenta might be at odds with your intended brand identity design.

☐ **Pick the right typography**

Stressing about finding just the right font may lead others to brand you as a "typography nerd," but you'll come out ahead when you pick a font that works in harmony with your logo and colors.

Fonts are powerful. The most famous fonts are recognizable even when taken out of context. You'll want a single primary typeface to lead your brand design, which should work well with your logo and color palette. It should also, like your logo and color palette, be simple.

Here are a few tips to keep in mind when choosing brand fonts:
- Don't use overly intricate fonts that are hard to read.
- Provide font guidelines for headlines and body text.
- Don't use more than two font families on a single document. (If it feels like it's too much, it's probably too much)
- Do mix contrasting fonts (such as a serif and a sans-serif).
- Give guidelines on font size and line length in your brand guide.

☐ **Leverage on-brand graphics and photography**

The final step in creating a brand identity is to build an extended visual language with supporting graphics, design assets, iconography, and photographs.

Take a look at Google's Visual Assets Guidelines to see how they carefully explain their take on icon design.
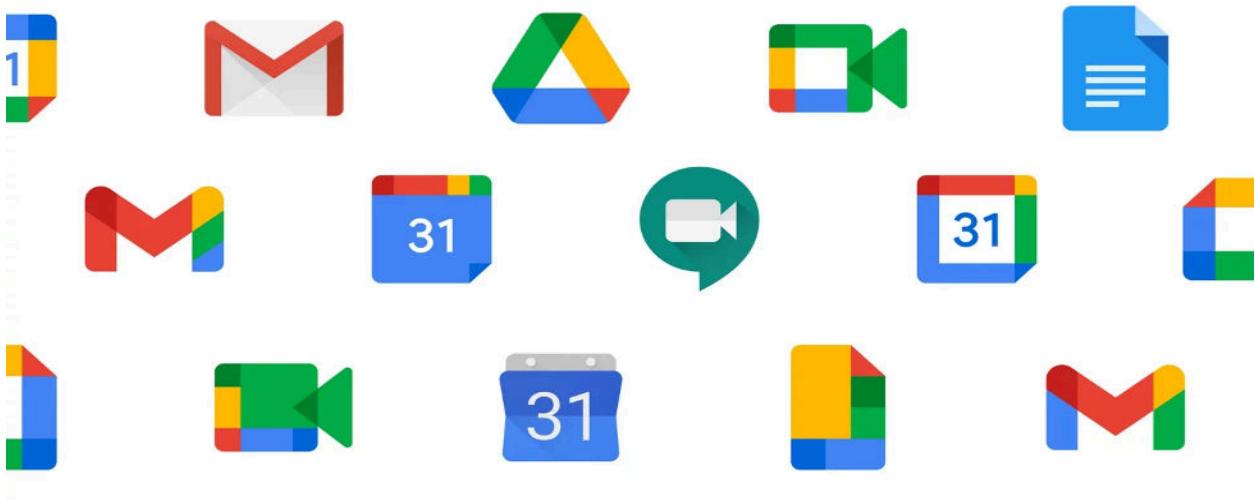
They cover a whole range of brand design considerations:

- A reductive (or "flat") approach
- A preference for geometric shapes
- Icons always face the front
- Straight, hard shadows as opposed to curved, soft ones
- Standard background colors
- Icons align to the pixel grid
- Icon padding according to shape

Because of Google's close attention to its extended visual language, when you see a Google icon, you know it's a Google icon.

Perusing other brand visual guides can help you get a better idea of what potential visual elements could work for your brand.

While there's always the possibility of redesigns and re-evaluation ahead, starting off with a strong, confident brand design and unified brand identity will add clarity and consistency to everything you do. Over time, your unique brand identity will be the one that pops into people's heads when they have a problem you can solve.