

A free Design Council resource for small businesses

The power of branding: a practical guide



We have created this free guide to shed some light on the subject of branding; what it is, how it works and how you can use it to help improve your business.

Over the next five chapters, we will cover:

- Why a business needs a brand to be successful
- The key ingredients of a brand
- How to manage and communicate your brand
- Branding for different market sectors
- The relationship between design and branding

What do we mean by the word ‘brand’?

The words brand and branding are thrown around liberally by all sorts of people in different contexts and with different meanings in mind, so it may help to start by asking ‘what exactly is a brand?’

The simplest answer is that a brand is a set of associations that a person (or group of people) makes with a company, product, service, individual or organisation. These associations may be intentional – that is, they may be actively promoted via marketing and corporate identity, for example – or they may be outside the company’s control. For example, a poor press review for a new product might ‘harm’ the product manufacturer’s overall brand by placing negative associations in people’s minds.

To illustrate the idea, let’s take what is arguably the best-known product – or brand – in the world: Coca-Cola.



Although essentially just a soft drinks product, Coca-Cola the drink is eclipsed by the sheer might of Coca-Cola the brand. This phenomenon is best summed up by the following quote from a Coca-Cola executive:

'If Coca-Cola were to lose all of its production-related assets in a disaster, the company would survive. By contrast, if all consumers were to have a sudden lapse of memory and forget everything related to Coca-Cola, the company would go out of business.'

In a 2007 survey of the value of global brands by branding agency Interbrand, Coca-Cola's brand equity was valued at US\$65.3bn, just under half the company's true market value.

So what are these all-powerful associations? For Coca-Cola, typical perceptions might be that it is the original cola drink ('The Real Thing'), that its recipe is secret and unsurpassed, that it's all-American or maybe global, that it's youthful, energetic, refreshing and so on. Visual associations might include the unmistakable red and white logo and corporate colours, or the unique shape and tint of the original glass bottles.



These are mostly positive brand associations, but there may be negative ones too. For example, Coca-Cola may be seen as unhealthy, or as a symbol of global 'imperialism' by American brands. What is seen as a positive association to some may be unpleasant to others and negative perceptions could become attached to a brand's identity even if the company strives to present a different character.



Of course, brands aren't limited to the food and drink category. If a brand is just a set of associations then practically anything could be said to have a brand, even individuals – think Simon Cowell or Gordon Ramsay.

Ramsay's own brand is so strong, in fact, that in 2007 he lent his weight to a major advertising campaign by Gordon's Gin. He was chosen not just because of his name, but because his association with a sense of quality and exclusivity mirrors the drinks manufacturer's own brand values.

Other high-profile examples of recognised brands include JCB, British Airways, Tate, Yahoo, The Big Issue or even London. From services to cities, products to publications, each carries a strong set of associations in the minds of a large number of people.

What is branding?

If a brand results from a set of associations and perceptions in people's minds, then branding is an attempt to harness, generate, influence and control these associations to help the business perform better. Any organisation can benefit enormously by creating a brand that presents the company as distinctive, trusted, exciting, reliable or whichever attributes are appropriate to that business.

While absolute control over a brand is not possible due to outside influences, intelligent use of design, advertising, marketing, service proposition, corporate culture and so on can all really help to generate associations in people's minds that will benefit the organisation. In different industry sectors the audiences, competitors, delivery and service aspects of branding may differ, but the basic principle of being clear about what you stand for always applies.

Case study

From fetes to Fortnums

How branding brought Mrs Massey to the masses

When Nicola Massey, a nurse turned chutney-cook, started making so many jars of chutney her husband was kept up all night sticking on labels, a close friend realised there was great commercial potential to be tapped with the help of the right design agency.



Adrian Collins, Managing Director of Ziggurat Brands, already knew Nicola Massey well, so he was able to start designing a brand identity for her products that reflected her personality.

Nicola Massey is impressed by the results this relationship brought. 'Sometimes you don't need a picture of yourself for something to be instantly recognisable,' she says. 'They had captured me completely: the pink, the humour, the use of the utensils in the design. It's unmistakably me.'

Read the full story online in our [case study](#).

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Why does your business need a brand?

In this chapter we will outline:

- How branding can help you stand out from your competitors
- How a brand can add value to your offer
- How your brand can help you engage with customers

Creating difference

Branding is a way of clearly highlighting what makes your offer different to, and more desirable than, anyone else's.

Effective branding elevates a product or organisation from being just one commodity amongst many identical commodities, to become something with a unique character and promise. It can create an emotional resonance in the minds of consumers who choose products and services using both emotional and pragmatic judgements.



Rachel's Organic Butter, for example, chose black for its packaging design so it would stand out from the typical yellow, gold and green colours (representing sunshine and fields) used by competitor products. The result is that the brand appears more premium, distinctive and perhaps even more 'daring' than its competitors.



Adding value

People are generally willing to pay more for a branded product than they are for something which is largely unbranded. And a brand can be extended through a whole range of offers too.

Tesco, for example, began life as an economy supermarket and now sells a wide range of products, from furniture to insurance. But a consistent application of the Tesco brand attributes, such as ease of access and low price, has allowed the business to move into new market sectors without changing its core brand identity.

This obviously adds value to the business, but consumers also see added value in the new services thanks to their existing associations with the Tesco brand. Of course, this can work in reverse too: if consumers don't like the Tesco brand in one product area, they're less likely to choose the company's offer in another product area.



Connecting with people

Creating a connection with people is important for all organisations and a brand can embody attributes which consumers will feel drawn to.

Apple's original launch of the iPod, for example, catapulted the company from computer business to mass-market entertainment brand, with iPod marketing drawing heavily on people's emotional relationship with their music.

By moving into music and film, Apple has redefined what the company does and shifted its brand association to something that connects with larger numbers of people outside computing or creative community.



Case study

Serious business

How brand identity helped Serious** distinguish itself

Waste management business Envirotech found that its customers were getting confused by competitors with a similar identities and it wanted to stand out from the crowd.

Managing Director, David Birkett attended a Designing Demand event about how design can help businesses and realised that branding was one way of increasing public recognition as well as improving other aspects of the business.



The new brand identity overcomes customer's inclination to snigger at the subject of waste management and is infinitely more recognisable. It's also difficult to confuse with other waste management firms.

Read the full story online in our [case study](#).

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The key ingredients

In this chapter we will outline:

- The four cornerstones of any good brand
- Examples from the business world

Defining your brand

So if you're thinking about how to rebrand your business, its products or services, or if you want to assess where your brand stands at present, there are a few key aspects to consider:

- The big idea – what lies at the heart of your company?
- Values – what do you believe in?
- Vision – where are you going?
- Personality – how do you want to come across?

If you can start to answer these questions with clarity and consistency then you have the basis for developing a strong brand.

Let's take a closer look at each of these key aspects in turn.

The big idea

The big idea is perhaps a catch-all for your company or service. It should encapsulate what makes you different, what you offer, why you're doing it and how you're going to present it. The other 'ingredients' are slightly more specific, but they should all feed from the big idea.

The big idea is also a uniting concept that can hold together an otherwise disparate set of activities. Ideally, it will inform everything you do, big or small, including customer service, advertising, a website order form, staff uniforms, corporate identity, perhaps right down to your answer machine message.

To pin down your own big idea you will need to look very carefully at your own business and the marketplace around you, asking these types of questions:

- How can you stand out?
- What is your offer?
- What makes you different?

- What is your ‘personality’?
- What do consumers want or need?
- Is there a gap in the market?

To aid this process it’s usually very helpful to get an outside perspective on things too, so consider working with a management consultant, business development consultant or design consultancy.

In more depth

If you’re thinking about commissioning a design project, we have compiled a free step-by-step guide which provides expert advice, useful tips and first-hand commentary from small business owners and designers.

Visit the Design Council website to [find out more](#)

Once decided, the articulation of these ideas can be put into action through branding techniques such as design, advertising, events, partnerships, staff training and so on. It is these activities that set up the consumer’s understanding and expectation of your company; in other words, its brand.

And once you’ve set up this brand ‘promise’, the most important thing is to ensure that your products and services consistently deliver on it.

Easyjet

Easyjet is a great example of a basic, clear big idea and its implementation.

The Easyjet premise is simply to make things easy and cheap. And because the big idea is so simple, company founder Sir Stelios Haji-Ioannou has extended it to a wide range of otherwise unrelated services – from pizzas to watches – without having to change the basic brand.



This is known as ‘brand stretch’ and we’ll look at this in more detail later.

Ikea

Ikea is another company with a big idea. Its brand is based around the notion that good design is for everyone, not just design snobs. Past campaigns have advised us to ‘chuck out the chintz’ and fit out our homes with well-designed furniture and products at affordable prices.



In 2004 their advertising played on this central idea of the ‘democratisation of design’ by using an elitist designer caricature that would turn his nose up at the low cost, mass produced Ikea products.

In stores, products are given individual names and customers stack up their trolleys from the warehouse themselves (saving Ikea money in the meantime). This is all in keeping with the idea that you don't need specialist, privileged knowledge to go out and buy good design.

Vision

Generating a vision for your company means thinking about the future, where you want to be, looking at ways to challenge the market or transform a sector. A vision may be grand and large-scale, or may be as simple as offering an existing product in a completely new way, or even changing the emphasis of your business from one core area to another.

Although corporate visions and mission statements can often appear to be little more than a hollow dictums from top management, a well-considered vision can help you to structure some of the more practical issues of putting a development strategy into action. If you're clear on what you're aiming at, it's obviously easier to put the structures in place to get there.

Microsoft

An example of vision on the large scale comes from Microsoft chairman Bill Gates, who knew exactly where he was going even in the early days:

'We started with a vision of a computer on every desk and in every home... Every day, we're finding new ways for technology to enhance and enrich people's lives. We're really only just getting started.'

And this comes from a company which doesn't (and has never) manufactured computers. The vision lies in seeing where the market is going and asking where you want to be: in this case, providing operating software for the computers that do indeed sit in every office and every home.

The Microsoft brand which resulted is inextricably linked with computing. Most PCs come with Windows as standard, even though computer hardware can be run with a number of different operating systems.

And as computing technology moves beyond the PC, Microsoft is well-placed as a leader in software provision for a growing range of devices and applications.



Values

Like the word 'brand' itself, the term 'brand values' is perhaps a little over-used in design and marketing circles, but it does relate to important aspects of how people see your organisation. It's what you stand for and it can be communicated either explicitly or implicitly in what you do. But imbuing your company's brand with a set of values is tricky for a number of reasons.

Firstly, everybody wants the same kinds of values to be associated with their business. A survey by The Research Business International (now part of Synovate) found that

most companies share the same ten values, namely: quality, openness, innovation, individual responsibility, fairness, respect for the individual, empowerment, passion, flexibility, teamwork and pride.

Secondly, it's not easy to communicate values: overt marketing may seem disingenuous, while not communicating your values in any way may result in people not seeing what you stand for. And lastly, any values you portray have to be genuine and upheld in the way your organisation operates.

Branding and design consultants can help you clarify what your organisation or business stands for and then they can develop ways for you to communicate that effectively. This might be through graphic design, language, advertising, staff training, the materials used in product manufacture and so on.

Pret A Manger

Pret A Manger makes a big play of valuing fresh food and minimising wastage. So, all its food is made on location each morning (with no sell by dates) and any left over at the end of the day is given to homeless charities and shelters.

In this way the company has laid out a value and has followed it through with the way it runs its service.

First Direct

First Direct was formed with high levels of customer service as an underpinning value. To deliver this, the business hired people with customer service training first and foremost, rather than those with banking experience.



Innocent Drinks

Innocent Drinks decided that one of its key values is openness. So its packaging invites customers to 'call the banana phone' with their views, or to drop in to the company's headquarters, at any time.



The Innocent website also allows visitors to join a ‘family’ of people who drink the company’s drinks. While this conversational approach may not be appropriate to every business, for Innocent it is a method of demonstrating how the company values openness and dialogue with its customers.

Read the full story online in our [case study](#).

Personality

Once you have established your ‘big idea’, vision and values, they can be communicated to consumers through a range of channels. The way you decide to present this communication – the tone, language and design, for example – can be said to be the personality of your company.



Personality traits could be ‘efficient and businesslike’, ‘friendly and chatty’, or perhaps ‘humorous and irreverent’, although they would obviously have to be appropriate to the type of product or service you are selling.

It need not have anything at all to do with the personalities of the people running the company; although it could, if you want to create a personality-driven company in the way that Richard Branson is very much the figurehead for Virgin.

And for smaller companies, the culture and style of the business can often reflect the founder, so its values and personality may be the same.

Here are a few examples of how you can start to control the elements of your company’s personality, conveying certain aspects to customers in different ways:

- Graphic design
the visual identity – hard corporate identity or soft, friendly caricature?
- Tone of voice
is the language you use (both spoken and written) formal or relaxed?
- Dialogue
can your users or customers contribute ideas and get involved in the organisation, or is it a one-way communication?
- Customer service
how are staff trained to communicate with customers? What level of customer service do you provide?

As companies grow, their personality and values are reflected more in internal culture and behaviour than through the characteristics of the founders. This personality then defines how the companies express their offer in the market.

John Smith's

John Smith's Bitter has recently built its brand almost entirely out of personality: in this case the traits of a bluff, no nonsense straight-talking Yorkshireman. This 'no nonsense' strapline and sentiment carries through all the company's communications with customers.

Putting it all together

Using the 'key ingredients' that we've outlined here – and bringing in consultants to help you define and implement them – will give you a solid understanding of your organisation's brand, as well as strategies on how to present it to people.

Starting with the 'big idea', you can then go on to refine and set out your company's vision, values and personality. And once these are all in place, you can think about hiring designers to turn your brand blueprint into tangible communications.

In more depth

If you haven't worked with designers before and would like some help in this area, you might like to read our free guide to [Finding and working with a designer](#).

Case studies

Clean break

How domestic cleaning manufacturers Challs reinvented its brand

Ipswich-based Challs International was good at launching cleaning products, but not so good at getting them noticed.

With the help of a design team, a confusing range of products was dramatically streamlined, repositioned, rebranded, repackaged and a powerful sales presentation created.



Sales increased by 35% and Challs is now listed in most of the UK's major supermarkets and is in negotiations to take the brand to Europe.

Read the full story online in our [case study](#)

Branching out

Rebranding to expand a family-run fruit farm

Bank End Farm was a thriving, family-run fruit farm in Finningley, outside Doncaster. But farmer David McCallum wanted to take the business on a stage, build a brand and sell his products to a much wider market.

A design expert appointed by the Designing Demand programme helped them write a brief for a couple of local design agencies then choose Sheffield-based Vivid Creative to work with on a brand identity project.

‘It has been a very good experience,’ says farm manager David McCallum. ‘It has really taken our business up a level and given us a much more professional image.’

Read the full story online in our [case study](#)

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Brand management techniques

In this chapter we will outline:

- Ways to communicate, manage and develop your brand identity
- Examples from the business world

Getting your message across

Once your encompassing brand ‘promise’ is in place, you need to consider how you will communicate it and then how you will manage and develop it over time. Here are a few techniques and issues that are worth considering:

Storytelling

An established technique in branding a business is to tell its story through communication elements such as corporate identity, packaging, stationery, marketing materials and so on. This can be quite low key, but it paints a picture of the provenance of the company and its products.

Sheffield butcher John Crawshaw, for example, hand-picks the meat sold in his three shops, whilst most of his competitors have their meat delivered in vacuum packs from an abattoir.



Credibility

The credibility of your brand’s offer must also be solid. For example, a Yorkshire drainage company called Naylor launched a range of lifetime-guaranteed flower pots, but the Naylor brand was inappropriate to market this range because it was associated too directly with the drainage side of the business.

So the company set up a new brand called Yorkshire Flowerpots, with its own tone of voice, personality and visual identity so that it could sell the products with greater credibility.



Differentiation

A great deal of branding is about defining and presenting a point of differentiation in the sector you're operating in. Get this right and your organisation will stand out brightly against your competitors.

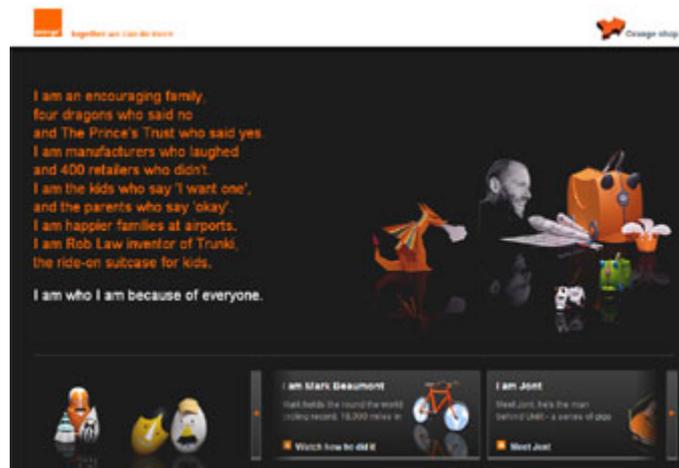
Construction company Hilti provides an example of differentiation in a sector. Whilst most other construction companies use technical images of buildings and products in their communications, Hilti emphasised its relationship with the people involved in construction, showing black and white photographs of workers using Hilti tools, which are highlighted in the company's corporate red.



Engaging with customers

Part and parcel of creating differentiation is engaging with your customers or users. If you stand out of the crowd for positive reasons and your tone of voice and communications are credible customers will look at what you've got to say.

When Orange launched in the mobile phone market in 1994, its identity, language and offer were very distinctive from its established rivals. It presented an optimistic vision of the future based on technology, but from a human rather than technical point of view. Its logo and name were abstract, creating stand out against BT Cellnet, T-Mobile and Vodafone, and its services were organised into simple talk plan packages.



For over a decade, this approach has remained more or less unchanged. For instance, the 2008 Orange campaign revolved around the slogan 'I am who I am because of everyone'. Adverts featured a series of individuals (including recognised entrepreneurs, athletes and writers) listing the people that have most influenced the course of their lives.

By appealing to everyone's sense of individualism and focusing on the value of human interaction and communication rather than competitive price plans or the latest

technology, Orange are able to extol the benefits of their service without ever having to mention mobile telephones.

Focusing your product portfolio

If you have a number of different products or services it may help to consider how you can streamline or organise them to make the offer easy for consumers to understand. Sometimes, the logic of internal company structures can dictate how a product offer is organised, but this does not necessarily make sense to an external customer. So think carefully about the best way to present what you do, even if it means setting things up differently from your internal organisation.

Rationalisation of products or services might also allow you to focus your investments more efficiently. After working through the Design Council's Designing Demand programme, household cleaning product manufacturer Challs did exactly this by shifting the focus to four key products, rather than the 92 it had previously been promoting.

Case study

To find out more about how branding helped Challs make its products stand out on the shelf, [read our case study online](#).

Multiple brands and brand 'stretch'

If your company operates in more than one sector you will have to consider how you present the business in each area. One approach, as illustrated by Virgin, EasyGroup and Tesco, is to have a single brand identity which is applied to sub-brands for the areas you operate in. So we have Virgin Money and Virgin Atlantic, Easy Pizza and Easy Cruise, Tesco Entertainment and Tesco Finance and so on.



Just how far you can 'stretch' your primary brand in this way depends on the core ideas, values and associations you have to start with. In some cases it may actually be more effective to develop a completely distinct brand for the different sectors you want to operate in, rather than stretch your existing brand to meet new markets. As mentioned above, for Naylor's flower pot business it made more sense to set up a dedicated brand called Yorkshire Flowerpots than to associate it with the existing Naylor drainage business.

There have been some notable and high-profile failures when it comes to brand stretch. A natural cleaning vinegar launched by Heinz bombed as a product because people associate Heinz with food, not cleaning. Harley Davidson (over-)extended its range to

include perfume. This failed because it was perceived as being at odds with the Harley Davidson brand values of masculinity and strength.

Endorsed brands

A slightly more sophisticated possibility is to set up 'endorsed' brands. This is where you create a new brand in its own right but allow the 'parent' brand of your main company to feature as an endorsement of the new brand. Playstation, for example, is a powerful brand in its own right, but it has always been endorsed as Sony Playstation, leveraging the reputation of Sony Corporation.

Reinvigorating your brand

Whatever sector your work in, keeping your communications fresh is essential. Using designers to help reassess your designs, language or identity every few years should be seen as an ongoing investment in your company rather than a costly extra.

All successful companies revisit their communications periodically, even the world's most recognisable brands. But reinvigorating your brand doesn't necessarily mean you have to start from the very beginning, reconsidering your big idea or vision and so on.

Take Coca-Cola for instance. In 2007 they commissioned design agency Turner Duckworth to produce a range of new packaging designs that would breathe new life into the cornerstones of Coke's visual identity; the classic logo, the contour bottle and the use of red and white.



If you're happy with your company's big idea, vision and personality, these things can remain the foundations of what you're doing - but the implementation of your brand should be refreshed to keep things on track and ensure it remains relevant to your target audience.

Naming

Brand names are an important aspect in setting the tone and personality of your brand, as well as being a key element in marketing activity. Along with design and tone of voice, a name can be a means of differentiation and should reflect the overall brand strategy you've developed.

Choosing a name can be a difficult task in itself, but it's made even harder because so many are already in use and trademarked. Be sure to check carefully that any names you're considering for a company, product or service aren't already in use and protected by law.

On the whole, a name falls into one of a few types, which can be arranged along a kind of spectrum of attributes. These attributes are:

Descriptive

Names which simply say what the company/brand does. For example:

- Easyjet – makes flying easy
- Toys 'R' Us – is all about toys
- AA (Automobile Association) – is for motorists

Evocative

Names which suggest associations to the brand but do not try to describe the offer precisely. For example:

- First Direct – first bank to offer instant telephone banking
- Innocent – natural purity of the fruit juice

Abstract

Names that break sector rules and stand out. They make no clear reference to the nature of the business. For example:

- Orange – bright, optimistic, Modernist
- Aviva – an invented name than suggests dynamism and movement
- Toast – suggests familiarity and warmth

Consistency

In branding and brand management a lot of importance is placed on achieving consistency, so that the same attributes and characteristics are evident in all areas of the business' operations. Essentially, 'the big idea' touches and informs everything you do.

Some contemporary brands are less heavily 'policed' in this way. There is a trend towards encouraging customers to generate their own content or interpretations within a framework of branded elements or templates. The London 2012 Olympics logo, for example, was designed by Wolff Ollins with these types of user-generated adaptations in mind.



Evolution or revolution

An important question when undertaking any reassessment of your brand is whether to go for small, incremental changes as a refresher, or to plump for a major overhaul of your company's or product's image.

Broadly speaking, evolution is preferable if you are already in a strong position with a solid customer base and you just need to keep up with a growing or developing market. Revolution, on the other hand, might be more appropriate if your customer base is in decline, the market has changed substantially since the inception of your current brand or you have no point of difference from your competitors.

To work through these kinds of questions it's a good idea to consider hiring a designer to look at the current state of your company and explore possibilities for developing it.

In more depth

We have compiled a free step-by-step guide to hiring and working with a designer which provides expert advice, useful tips and first-hand commentary from small business owners and designers.

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BP: evolution then revolution

A BP corporate identity designed in the early 1920s was used for over 80 years, with refreshed versions appearing periodically to keep the logo looking contemporary.

However, in 2000 there was a break from the past when the corporate identity was completely redesigned to create the current tessellated 'sunflower' or Helios identity. This change was a reflection of a change in the company's approach to environmental concerns.



BP's emphasis on the development of renewable energy sources was encapsulated in the tagline 'Beyond Petroleum', along with other similar aspirational, environmentally themed messages, such as 'bigger picture' and 'better products'.

Apple: revolution then evolution

The original Apple Computer logo was a complex, illustrated picture of Isaac Newton sitting under a tree. Company chief executive Steve Jobs thought the overly detailed logo had something to do with the slow sales of the Apple I computer, so he decided on a complete change in identity – a revolution of the corporate visual design - and commissioned the rainbow striped logo, which then ran for 22 years. A revolution in branding was needed to kick-start demand for the company's products. But by 1998, Apple was firmly established as a successful computer manufacturer and so the rainbow identity underwent an evolution to become the more contemporary 'transparent' Apple logo in use today.

Durex: evolution

Condom manufacturer Durex decided to broaden its appeal by positioning the company as being concerned with sexual wellbeing, rather than just condoms. It's an evolution of the existing Durex brand that adapts to a changing marketplace and keeps the company's identity and associations fresh.



Lucozade: revolution

Carrying the slogan 'Lucozade aids recovery', the product was originally manufactured by a Newcastle chemist as a source of energy for people who are unwell. But its market share was declining in the 1980s, so the company opted for a revolution of the brand, targeting a completely new customer base. Its energy-giving qualities were promoted to the sports performance market and an advertising campaign featuring athlete Daley Thompson used the new slogan 'Lucozade replaces lost energy'. Product packaging was completely redesigned and sales subsequently tripled between 1984 and 1989.

Shelter: evolution

Housing charity Shelter had changed its focus to the problems of poor housing conditions, but a strong association with homelessness – its previous focus – remained. So its identity was evolved to emphasise the fact that housing is at the core of its activities.

To achieve this, the letter 'h' was adjusted on all its typography so that the top of the 'h' looks like a pitched roof.

Case study

The benefits are clear

How rebranding helped Kingsdown Water tap into new markets

It can be considered risky to meddle if you've already got a winning formula, but re-vamping your brand can also bring great rewards.

William Bomer, Managing Director of Kingsdown Water was aware of the risks when he decided to refresh the look of the company's mineral water brand. But Bomer wanted to take the gamble to generate new revenue streams.



In the first eight months after brand was relaunched the value of sales were up by roughly a third on the previous year and the conversion of customers at the top end of the market increased five-fold, with several top restaurants now stocking Kingsdown water.

Read the full story online in our [case study](#)

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Branding for different sectors

In this chapter we will outline:

- The similarities and differences between branding in different market sectors
- Examples from the business world

Start-up businesses

If you're launching a new business, you're in a unique position to operate as what is often called a 'challenger brand'. This means that you can take a look at a market sector from the outside, assess all the players, opportunities or gaps in the market and then launch your product with a brand that challenges and shakes up the conventions of the sector. It's hard to do this once you're established as there's more to lose, so think carefully about how brave and 'rule'-breaking your product or service can be if you're about to launch to market.

Another benefit you may have as a start-up is that the business is likely to be small and therefore responsive and adaptable, with no existing processes that have to be changed to create a new brand. In short: you've got one shot to do something exciting, relatively cheaply, so go for it.

Gü: start-up brand

Gü was launched into the chilled desserts market as a premium product whose name (an invented word) simultaneously hints at a European origin and evokes thoughts of gooey chocolate or treacle.

The name and graphic black and white packaging all broke the 'rules' of design and branding in the desserts sector and the product consequently stands out strongly in supermarkets.

The brand has subsequently been extended with the launch of Frü, a range of fruit desserts.



Public sector

Although all branding is about communicating a clear offer to your customers or users, branding in the public sector is not necessarily as concerned with maximum market stand-out, as it typically is in the commercial/private sector. For public sector organisations, such as the police force and health services, the focus may be on clarity and access to important information. So branding and design may focus on signposting this information or communicating issues clearly in order to change people's behaviour – a Department of Health quit smoking campaign, for example.

Clarity can sometimes fall foul of the complex nature of public sector services, which are often run by a network of stakeholder organisations or partners. In branding terms, putting the logos of all such partners on 'customer'-facing communications can lead to visual clutter, a lack of clarity and confusion. It's important, therefore, to be clear when a brand or branded campaign is needed and to ensure that its identity is distinct and clear for users.

National Health Service: greater clarity

The NHS visual identity had become fragmented, with around 1,000 organisations using different identities. An NHS identity programme was set up to address this and create a national unified brand. This ensures clarity and consistency and permits costs savings across the organisation because implementing one brand is more cost effective than supporting many.



Service companies

Whilst most companies and organisations are providing a service of one type or another, for some businesses customer service is the dominant part of the offer. For these companies particular attention needs to be paid to how the brand (the big idea and all its components) are reflected in the way the service is provided and the way staff interact with customers.

In essence, service brands are built on the people who deliver them. This means that staff needed to be trained to get an understanding of the company's culture, its 'promise' to customers and how they will be put into practice on a day to day basis. In this scenario, the human resources department is closely linked to brand management.

First Direct: service

First Direct was the first company to bring a 24-hour banking service to the market and its level of service was a key message in promoting the bank to potential customers.

To ensure the delivery of high quality service, First Direct recruits people with customer service skills rather than those who are already in the banking industry. This ensures that the company's service delivery matches its brand 'promise'.



Business to business

A lot of the brands discussed in this guide are consumer-facing brands, but many businesses market their products and services directly to other businesses, not the public. But the principles of effective branding apply in just the same way in the B2B sector as elsewhere. As in consumer products, B2B companies need to use branding to differentiate, stand-out and create a distinct personality, even if that personality is more corporate and business-like in its tone.

Mechan: B2B branding

Mechan designs and manufactures mechanical handling equipment for the rail industry, but by 2005 its image was starting to look dated. At the same time the company was faced with a static UK market and growing competition from abroad, so it needed stronger communications to create impact with potential business customers.



Working with a designer the company researched what the brand actually stood for (the big idea) and then a branding consultancy created a visual identity that is strong, clean and simple and works across all the company's communications, including products, website, trade stands and literature.

Read the full story online in our [case study](#).

Case study

Saving grace

How a brand refresh changed the public perception of NS&I

In the late 1990s, the government's National Savings department was perceived as an old fashioned brand for grannies and children.

Working with a design team, National Savings developed a new brand name, identity and positioning. They formulated a new approach to the marketplace that was consumer needs-led rather than product-focused.

In 2000, National Savings re-launched as NS&I. Inspired by the positive reception they received, NS&I went on to redesign their website – increasing their online sales by £45m in just eight weeks.



Read the full story online in our [case study](#)

A free Design Council resource for small businesses

Design and branding

In this chapter we will outline:

- The relationship between design and branding
- The key design ingredients of branding
- Examples from the business world

As we started out by saying, an organisation's brand is a whole set of associations which people make when they think about or encounter that business.

A common misconception – and one that designers are always at pains to correct – is that a brand is simply a logo or identity. The logo is just one manifestation of a brand, although it's often a top-level communication, seen most frequently by the greatest number of people. It should therefore embody the key ingredients of the brand in a distinctive, recognisable marque.



Take the Nike 'swoosh' for example. Designed in 1971 by Carolyn Davidson, then a graphic design student at Portland State University, the swoosh is a simple yet effective logo that conveys energy and movement, appropriate to a company that makes performance sportswear.

So, while brand building and branding are complex, strategic activities, there is almost always a vital creative design component too.

Design is what translates the ideas into communication. And many designers will work through both the strategy and the implementation to ensure that the results are consistent, adaptable and in-keeping with your original brand attributes.

Key design ingredients

There is a range of design elements that can be used to convey a brand proposition. Here are a few of them, with an example in each case:

- Colour – Orange
- Shape – Toilet Duck
- Name – Egg
- Touch/materials – iPhone
- Sound – Intel
- Illustration – Lloyds TSB

- Typography – BBC
- Environment – Guinness Storehouse



After working through a branding project with designers you should be left with something called brand guidelines. This is a document which details exactly how the different design elements (typically visual) should be applied in different situations. It will give information on things like typography, graphics, colours, materials, templates and photography used in the visual manifestation of the brand, providing instructions on how to apply them in different contexts, at different scales and so on. More detailed brand guidelines may include things like cultural or behavioural directions for staff training.

The organisation can use these brand guidelines to manage the brand after the designer's work on the project is completed without losing the original consistency and clarity of the designs and, most importantly, with losing sight of your original big idea.

In more depth

If you're thinking commissioning a design project, we have compiled a free step-by-step guide which provides expert advice, useful tips and first-hand commentary from small business owners and designers.

Visit the Design Council website to [find out more](#).

Case study

Smooth operators

Strong brand values are at the heart of Innocent drinks' success

From its humble beginnings as a stall at a small music festival in 1998, Innocent drinks now lays claim to an impressive 63% share of the £111m UK smoothie market.

Yet despite becoming Britain's fastest growing food and drink company, Innocent has managed to maintain the integrity of its brand values, retaining the trust and support of its employees, customers and retail partners.

Read the full story online in our [case study](#)

