

# WHAT IS A STRAPLINE?

A Wordtree explainer



Word↑tree

# Wordtree explainers

## - a little intro

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*Brand strategy can be difficult to pin down - especially when different organisations have different explanations of all the elements of brand. In our explainers series, we set out what we mean when we use brand terminology.*

*In this explainer, we share our definition - at top level - of a strapline.*

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# WHAT IS A STRAPLINE?

# What is a strapline?

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This is a small question with a big answer. At a very pragmatic level, a strapline is the short line of text you often see underneath a brand's logo - like HSBC's *The world's local bank*, or Tesco's *Every Little Helps*.



That's one definition of a strapline. The wider answer to this question is that a strapline is simultaneously part of a brand's positioning, its brand storytelling and sometimes its promise to its audiences.

# Is a strapline the same as a slogan?

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Strictly speaking, no - although you do hear the two words being used interchangeably. Traditionally, a slogan is a short phrase that's used in an advertising campaign. So it has a shorter lifespan than a strapline, which should last as long as any iteration of a brand.

The lines do get blurred though, because there have been occasions when a great advertising slogan has become so popular, it becomes part of the permanent brand. A good example of this is *Ronseal: Does Exactly What It Says On The Tin*.



Another example of a campaign slogan is Marmite's *Love It Or Hate It*. You'll hear it in all the brand's advertising, but you'll never see it written beneath a logo.

At the end of the day though, it doesn't really matter what you call it - many professionals now call slogans "campaign straplines". What matters is the purpose you put them to.

# Is a strapline the same as a motto?

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Straplines and mottos share a number of characteristics. They're both short lines of text that start to frame the story of the organisations they describe.

The way we think of mottos - things like the Royal Airforce's *Per Ardua Ad Astra* (through adversity to the stars), or the Scouts *Be Prepared* - is that they're inward-looking. They're about bringing a group of people together with a single philosophy. Straplines, on the other hand, are outward-looking. They're about telling a brand's story to the wider world.



And again, a great motto can also become strapline-like - telling the wider world something important about the organisation. For example, *Be Prepared* isn't just something that's understood internally by people involved in the Scouting movement. It also tells the world something of what the organisation is about.

Similarly, a great strapline can become motto-like - for example, The Washington Post's strapline is *Democracy Dies in Darkness*.



It's a profound, philosophical statement that has a motto-feel to it. It's a statement that looks outwards, telling the world about the WP's purpose... but you can imagine that it's also a constant reminder to everyone who creates the paper - and indeed, invests in it - what everyone is working towards.

But in origins, a motto starts looking inwards - and a strapline starts looking outwards.





**WHAT IS THE  
PURPOSE OF  
STRAPLINES?**



# What is the purpose of straplines?

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Straplines can serve a number of purposes - some of them all at the same time. They can help to position a brand in its marketplace. They can help audiences understand what an organisation does.

In large, complex organisations, they can articulate an ethos that unites all their various activities. They convey personality. And the really good ones are memorable, helping audiences to distinguish one brand from another.



# Straplines as an element of brand positioning

When you've decided the position you want to take in the market, a strapline can help to make this crystal clear. So in the HSBC example, *The world's local bank* suggests a whole set of values and ideals about the way that you as an individual or business will experience banking with HSBC.

The four short words give you the feeling that you'll matter as a person to HSBC, that you won't be lost in a huge corporate system. For businesses, it's also reassuring that wherever in the world you want to trade, HSBC can partner you.

A little while ago we helped an organisation called ASH to reposition its brand. They're expert consultants who install all things electronic into mass-multiple retail environments.

They configure stores so that they can do everything from basics like accepting loyalty cards at the cash registers, through to installing sophisticated footfall tracking and facial recognition software.

What they were struggling with at the time, though, was seeing beyond the technical and customer service aspects of what they delivered.

We created this strapline for them:

**Closer to your customer**

It was a nod to their excellent customer service, but more importantly it positioned them as enablers for their marketing and customer experience clients.

In a line-up with their competitors, the new strapline promised a very different kind of understanding of their clients' needs - as well as a promise to fulfil them.

They don't sound like techy, dispassionate installers. They sound like people who get what you're trying to achieve and can help you achieve it - all in four words.



# Straplines as a part of brand storytelling and messaging

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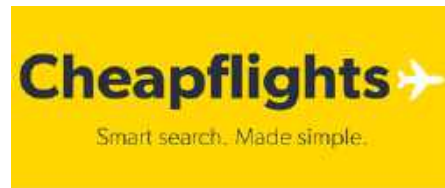
If you've done all the work to articulate your brand, you ought to be able to distil that narrative down into a number of key messages. Then you use these messages consistently, so that when people think about your brand, they recall exactly the story you want them to.

If, for example, you think of a flight search engine, the things you will want it to offer are:

- Access to the biggest range of flights
- Great deals
- Easy and straightforward search

And if a brand can persuade you that they offer all of these things, you're likely to keep going back to them. So you keep using these messages in all of your communications.

In this messaging approach, your strapline becomes your apex message (or your secondary message if the primary point is made in your brand name). Which can work like this:



# Straplines as relationship builders

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Because straplines can (and should) convey personality - and because they can convey a promise - they set out from very first contact with a brand what a relationship with it might be.

GE - manufacturer of everything from super-advanced medical technology through to lightbulbs and domestic appliances - could sound like a soulless corporation churning out machines. But its brand tells you otherwise - right from the outset - with the strapline *Imagination at Work*. It's a promise of creativity and transformation.



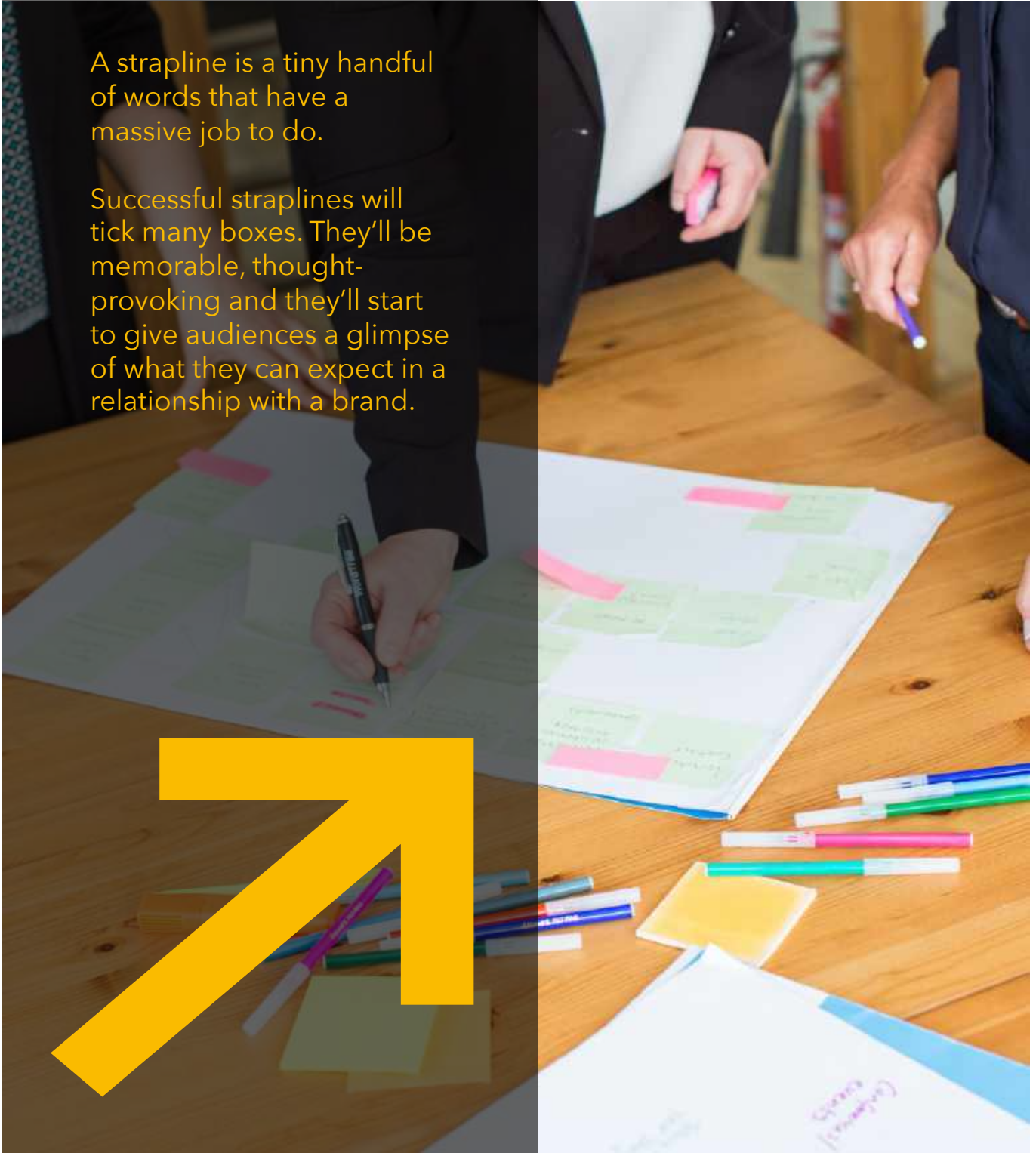
In terms of relationship-building, audiences know what GE is promising and what they ought to be able to expect. GE, of course, has to live up to this in all its interactions with its clients and customers.

# So there it is...

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A strapline is a tiny handful of words that have a massive job to do.

Successful straplines will tick many boxes. They'll be memorable, thought-provoking and they'll start to give audiences a glimpse of what they can expect in a relationship with a brand.





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