

WHAT IS BRAND?

A Wordtree explainer

Word↑ree

Wordtree explainers

- a little intro

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 brand.

In it, we use a broad definition of "customer". We believe that every organisation - whether it's selling soap powder, or convincing people to give up smoking - has a customer. We even think that at some levels, employees can be viewed as customers. So when you read the word "customer", just know that it's shorthand for, "the people you want to persuade".

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Why is brand important?

Human beings get through life by being able to slot information into convenient categories in their minds. It helps us all to store information and to make comparisons and decisions.

All organisations need their ideal customers to:

- Know exactly the right information about them
- Store it in the right mental compartment
- Be able to access, retrieve and talk about their information easily
- And use it to make favourable decisions about them

A good, solid brand achieves all these things. It narrates an uncomplicated story for your customers, so they know exactly where to pop it in their own mental reference library - and remember its contents favourably.

If this sounds a palaver, we have two words for you: **Trust** and **competitors**.

Trust

Ideally, you want your customers to trust you so much that they come back to you again and again - and recommend you to others. If your organisation tells a consistent story and feels reliably the same every time your customers interact with it, you're more likely to build trust faster.

This is because giving your customers easy ways to get to know you allows them to increase the space they've allocated for you in their minds. When you do this, they find it easier to remember you and talk about you - and because they recognise you and your story, they'll find it easier to trust you too.

Competitors

Whatever industry you operate in, you have other organisations vying for your customers' time, attention and cash. If you don't make the information about your organisation easy to love, remember and retrieve, then one of your competitors will.

JARGON TO BE AWARE OF

Mindshare

Gaining "mindshare" means you've created a good mental slot for your offer - and because of this, when people think of your type of thing, they think of your organisation first.

What is brand?

A brand is all the emotional, intangible information about your organisation. It's the story of what makes it tick, its hopes, dreams, morals and values.

For some organisations, the very thought of emotion playing a part in business can be difficult to stomach. Surely all business is about generating hard cash?

Maybe. But to make money, you have to deal with people. And people are fundamentally emotional - even when they think they're not. They might be buying your thing for a rational reason like price, or because it fulfils a defined need in their organisation. But as well as that, they're buying it to satisfy emotional needs.

So a corporation buying legal services may well consider cost

and relevant experience. But they'll also be considering emotional needs including:

- Which law firm is least likely to get me fired?
- Which will make me look great?
- Who will I get on with?

So yes, of course you need to set out the rational side of what you do - for example, by listing your services on your website. But you also need to present an emotional story - your brand.

"We're the legal firm that's always there for you," may not be a rational or quantifiable claim. But it's a clear brand statement that could be just as important in winning and retaining business.

Differentiation

Let's say you have two organisations that both sell anti-dandruff shampoo. Both shampoos are about the same price. So what's going to make people choose one brand over the other?

For some people, it could be your environmental credentials. For others it could be the promise of zero dandruff every time. The thing is, you have to spell out whatever makes you different. Or in other words, you have to differentiate. Otherwise, how is anyone going to choose you?

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The components of brand

When people think about “brand” they often think “logo”. At Wordtree, we believe this is jumping the gun somewhat.

A logo is simply a visual representation of brand.

When we talk about “brand”, what we mean is a description of the emotional aspects of your organisation. This should be a complete, codified reference. Some brand people call this a “brand platform” or a “brand blueprint”.

We tend to use the term “brand platform” because in setting out the emotional, intangible side of your organisation, it provides a foundation – a platform – for every single way you tell your organisation’s story: Visually, verbally and behaviourally.

Typically a brand platform consists of some or all of these “assets”.

Oftentimes, these individual assets overlap, so it’s almost never necessary to include all of them in one platform:

- Brand values
- Brand vision
- Brand mission
- Brand personality
- Brand promise
- Brand essence
- Brand purpose



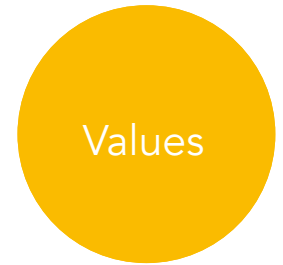
The components of brand... continued



BRAND VALUES



Values are your organisation's morals - what it believes in, how it behaves and what it would never do. We usually advise our clients to never have more than three values - and to make sure that their values are differentiating.



BRAND VISION

This is what your organisation has been placed on earth to achieve. A good brand vision is aspirational, presenting your organisation with a goal it's always working towards. This could be an end to homelessness, happy faces at teatime, spreading ideas - or anything else in between.



BRAND MISSION



This is what your organisation does to achieve its vision. In practice, visions and missions often merge into one thing. So unless you have a very distinct way of working - for example, you're applying creative building construction practices to a vision to eradicate homelessness (rather than, for example, raising funds for homeless people), you probably don't need both a vision and a mission.



BRAND PERSONALITY

What kind of organisation are you? Are you friendly (and if so, what kind of friendly)? Are you brave? Loyal? Professional? Whimsical? Anything else? Personality, in our view, is an under-considered component of the brand platform. Why? Because two organisations can share similar values, but they will live them in different ways, depending on their personalities. So an organisation that values environmental sustainability, and is professionally friendly and analytical may live out its love for the planet in a completely different way to one that's laid-back and casual.

The components of brand... continued

BRAND ESSENCE

In our view, a brand essence and a brand promise are pretty similar beasts. A brand essence means, when you boil it all down, what is at the heart of your brand offer? What's inside the nut kernel when you crack all the shell away?

Essence

BRAND PURPOSE

This is the relatively new kid on the block. A brand purpose is similar to a brand vision or mission. In the last couple of years, "purpose" has been used to describe a vision/mission that's designed to get all internal teams on board. In this sense, it's often seen as more of a culture-building tool, which goes some way to explain its popularity with HR teams. We've always believed brand applies as much to internal teams as it does to external customers. But if a new name makes this even more the case, then fine - we'll go with it.

Purpose

BRAND RELATIONSHIP WITH CUSTOMERS

Many brand platforms also nail down the nature of their organisation's relationship with its customers. Are you the superhero who swoops in to solve your customers' problems? Are you an expedition leader who'll help them get through a tough journey? Or an unshockable friend who won't judge? We find that defining this relationship helps organisations to communicate consistently and build trust more rapidly.

Relationship

BRAND POSITIONING

To carve out space in your ideal customer's mind, you must present them with a story that can't be easily confused with another brand's. So your positioning sets out what makes you different and special. Your positioning must give clear signals to customers about how they should file information about you in their minds. So a cosmetics company may file itself under "natural and kind" or it may position itself as "exotic party" or "wholesome vintage". Its positioning will depend on the audiences it wants to target, its unique selling points (USPs) and how its competitors have positioned themselves.

Positioning

The components of brand... continued

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Brand asset

This could be any one of the many parts that make up the whole of a brand. A brand asset can be a core concept or it can be an expression of brand (see page 06).

Bringing your brand to life

Brand consultants often use this phrase. When they say it, they mean they have all the theory (the components, brand platform stuff) and now they're going to make it into something tangible - in design, writing, video or whatever. They also use it to mean that they're going to achieve brand alignment (see below).

Brand alignment

This means making sure that every single element of your organisation's story, whether it's told verbally, visually, via music, environment or behaviour - stems directly out of your brand platform.

For example, if your brand is calm, considered and heritage, your brand-aligned call waiting music must also be calm, considered and heritage. Random chart music is very unlikely to be brand-aligned. Similarly, conversations in your support centres must also be calm and considered with a touch of heritage. So colleagues may answer the phone with a: "Good afternoon..." rather than a, "Hi...".

USP

Unique selling point. This is an attribute of your product or service that can be tangible - like a patented technology or special ingredient, or intangible - like a special customer promise. Be aware that USPs tend not to remain unique for long.

Expressions of brand

Once you've established a platform for your brand, you can begin to make the concepts and ideas it contains more tangible visually, verbally and behaviourally. Expressions of brand include design (your visual identity), written and spoken communications (your tone of voice), your music, environment and behaviours (your culture).

Visual identity

Your visual identity is made up of colour palettes, typefaces, designs (including your logo), photography and videography. Your design team or partners should take your brand platform and interpret it visually. They will also create guidelines for you so that you use your visual identity consistently (because consistency creates higher levels of recognition and trust).

Tone of voice

This is a Wordtree specialism, and if you want to read our in-depth thoughts about it, you can read [Brand language: Tone of Voice the Wordtree Way](#). We always describe tone of voice as being personality expressed in words.

Aligning your organisation's language to its brand is a powerful thing to do for a number of reasons.

Top amongst these are:

- Language taps directly into our neural networks, so changing language can change the ways your teams think about your organisation and their work
- Language is also a vector of culture – so if you want to align your culture to your brand, language is a great way to achieve this
- You'll also get clear, consistent and interesting communications, which will boost recognition of and interest in your brand

Culture

The way your organisation thinks, works and operates can be summed up as its culture. A great culture attracts and retains the right people. It also boosts brand awareness and helps your ideal customers to store information about you in their minds.

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Logo

The graphical device that represents your company's brand – like the Nike swoosh or McDonald's golden arches.

Verbal identity

This is another term that's used for "tone of voice".

Marque

This is a term that's sometimes used instead of logo.

Strapline

The line of text you sometimes see underneath a logo.

Lockup

Where your logo and strapline exist in one defined graphic. They can't be separated because they're "locked up".

So where do you start with brand?



It's notoriously difficult to define and articulate your own brand – which is why so many organisations get brand consultants to help them. When you work with a brand consultancy – like Wordtree – you get the benefit of fresh eyes. You also get a broader perspective, because they're likely to have worked with a lot of different organisations, both inside and outside of your sector. External consultants are also independent (or should be) – so their biggest interest is in making the brand work, robustly and consistently for a number of years to come.



Where you shouldn't start with any brand articulation is with design.

It's tempting to leap in and start thinking in terms of colours and logo. But don't. You'll waste resources and possibly end up with a brand that has to be fixed further down the line.



If you'd ever like to chat to us about your brand – or come to any of our events – please give us a call. We're always delighted to hear about people's projects and to begin to help unravel knotty challenges.

JARGON TO BE AWARE OF

Back rationalisation

The art of making a brand asset (usually the visual identity, but sometimes values) make sense after the fact. This usually comes about when an organisation has prioritised design first, then created values that support the design rather than the

organisation. Very quickly, it becomes apparent that neither the design, nor the values work in every circumstance. They're square pegs that need to be squished into star-shaped holes rapidly, because too much money and reputation has been put on the line to

go back to the drawing board. So you back-rationalise and find a way to make it all work. This approach is to be avoided. Instead, make adequate time to test brand concepts, and **don't start with design.**



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