

Removing your brand barriers to growth



Bullhorn

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Corporation

Your business is ready to grow. But, you are concerned that your brand isn't ready. There are barriers to fulfilling your vision. There are barriers to maximizing your impact. We put this checklist together to help you identify what is nagging you in the back of your mind. This list will clarify what you need to work on, or it will give you the confidence to make that future you see a reality. This document is broken out into the primary components of your brand:



Brand Strategy



Brand Name



Visual Identity



Brand Language



Website

Brand Strategy

Setting lofty goals for your brand seems important. But voicing and addressing your brand's challenges first is more important. And is part of forming a good brand strategy. A solid (and simple) brand strategy includes a diagnosis, an approach, and action items. It gives you a blueprint for building a stronger brand that connects with your audience and makes an impact. Have you identified your brand barriers? Are you focusing on the bigger picture and not how to get there? Here are some questions to help you determine if you are on or off track when it comes to brand strategy.

ASK YOURSELF

- Can you articulate the problem you are solving for your target customer or within your industry?**
- Do you have a thorough understanding of your target customer(s)?** What are their pain points? Can you describe their journey with your brand from start to finish?
- Can you describe how your approach is differentiated from competitors?** This requires keeping a pulse on your industry landscape. Even if you don't have one-to-one competition, you can think about things people would choose alternatively to your product or service. That could include inaction.
- Does your brand have a distinguishable viewpoint?** Do you look, feel, or sound different? Once you determine your unique approach, you must visually and verbally translate that across your brand. Are you memorable? Do you take a stand? Remember, if some people love you, some people might hate you. And that's okay.
- Are your marketing materials working for you?** Most importantly, does your brand work in application? Everything you do must connect back to your strategy. You need your website to work with your social channels and pitch decks. They don't have to look the same, but they should look and feel consistent.



Brand Name

Your name is the primary reference point for your brand and your culture. That makes the name a pretty important word or two. The name can be negative, neutral, or great. It might as well be great. And you should be able to point it back to your brand strategy. Here are a couple of questions to make sure your name isn't a barrier to your impact.

ASK YOURSELF

- Can you protect your intellectual property by registering your name as a trademark?** You might have started small or quickly and didn't think much about the name. As you grow, it becomes more important to answer this question definitively.
- If you have a trademark, can it grow with you?** It is common for a business to pivot into different services or products as you find your way. Your name might have been a registered trademark in the past. Can it be in the category you are moving toward?
- Is your name misleading?** Again, our business evolves and grows. Sometimes, a name that once made perfect sense is now confusing your customers.
- Is your name forgettable?** It is common to start with a more generic name to test the concept. Or, maybe you abbreviate a long name to make it shorter, only to realize the abbreviation is less memorable.
- Is your name limiting?** Is it so specific that it limits your vision? Does it limit your ability to recruit? If it is, then it is certainly a barrier to growth.



Visual Identity

When your customers close their eyes and think of you, this is what they see. They might see your logo, but they will certainly see your typographic choices, your brand colors, and your choices with illustrations or photography. Is what they see in their head your vision? Or is it compromised in places? Did it get watered down? Did it never get the attention it deserves? Your visual identity should also align with your brand strategy. Here are some questions that will help you hone in on what is and isn't working.

ASK YOURSELF

- Is your logo as simple as possible?** A simple logo is scalable. It works as a social avatar and on the side of a barn. It has the endurance you need to realize your vision.
- Is your logo flexible?** You will need to stack your logo. You will need it to be vertical or horizontal. You will need to use the symbol by itself, and the name by itself. Is your visual identity ready for the flexible future?
- Do your colors work for you?** Is your strategy to fit in with more established companies or look like a disruptor? The way you use color is a big part of how you are perceived.
- Is your typography helping readers?** Type hierarchy helps move users through a website. It helps someone know what is important on a sign. Are you leading your customers, or are you putting the work on them?
- Does your imagery feel stock?** Nothing kills differentiation like stock photography or illustration. You can feel it. We can feel it. If your company is different, show it.



Brand Language

Your language is more than messaging. Your language is the foundation of your brand: your core values, your voice. It communicates who you are, what you do, how you do it, and, most importantly, why you do what you do. And consistent use of language helps you build trust and connect with your audience. And it should match your brand strategy. Are you able to articulate your value? Does your audience know it? Does your voice match your brand's purpose? Here are some questions that will help you determine whether you have a solid foundation in language.

ASK YOURSELF

- Do all your stakeholders describe the business in the same way?** If everyone is not communicating your brand's purpose accurately, your audience doesn't know what you do. By muddying the waters, you lose trust.
- Does your brand align with your values?** First, have you articulated your values? If so, can people tell who you are without interacting with you? Do you share them publicly? This is the foundation of your differentiation.
- Does your brand voice clearly convey your impact?** Does it capture your personality? Can you articulate it with confidence? This is hard to get right. Your audience wants to connect with you, and if your brand voice is on point, you will strengthen their loyalty.
- Do you have a set of guidelines that you can share with anyone writing for or speaking on behalf of your company?** Your job is hard enough. You shouldn't spend a lot of time teaching team members how to communicate for the brand. Clear and simple brand guidelines is an empowering resource to own.
- Is your website content an extension of your foundational language, your brand voice?** Are you including long paragraphs that force readers to scroll and scroll? Do you have a set of headlines to quickly engage a reader and visually break up content?



Website

For most of us, our website is our most important marketing asset. It is the center of the web. Everything else points there: social media, advertisements, presentations. We have to get the website right for everything else to work together. It is also the most complicated to get right. Everything before this has to be right: the brand strategy, the brand name, the visual identity, and the brand language. If they aren't working, it is obvious. The result is a confusing website — hard to navigate or generic. Think of this as your brand test case applied to marketing. Ask yourself these questions to ensure your marketing isn't a barrier.

ASK YOURSELF

- Do you have a business goal for your website?** Does your website do all the functional things it needs to for your customers? Your website needs a purpose and defined goals, or it's impossible to gauge success.
- Do you have brand guidelines?** Brand guidelines define the agreed-upon brand colors, typography, and language. Without guidelines, your website won't match who you are, or be an extension of your brand.
- Do you know how people find your website?** Are your SEO (Search Engine Optimization) tactics up to date? Having broken links or missing pages hurts your ranking on search engines.
- Do you know who is using your website?** Do your customers find your website engaging and useful? Are you continually updating your website? Is all the information on the website accurate? Most people will visit your website before committing. Your website validates you. An old design or inaccurate information gives users a negative perception of your brand.
- Is your website accessible?** Do your colors meet the proper WCAG contrast ratio? Is all of the copy on your website legible with the ability to be read by a screen reader? Your website should include thoughtfully designed and developed tools and technology for people with disabilities to understand and navigate your site.



Nice job.

You just covered a lot of ground thinking about your brand. The process may have revealed some brand strengths and/or aspects of your brand that need clarifying. If you have boxes left unchecked, you might have some questions. We can help.

Send us a note, and let's chat.
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