

BRAND GUIDELINES – finding the one good reason

If you're reading this, the chances are you have an interest in branding. As a brand strategy, design and communications agency, we see branding as a tool capable of transforming every aspect of a business. Branding influences all the ways people experience and interact with your business.

*“I've got a hundred million reasons to walk away
... I just need one good one to stay.” – Lady Gaga**

Businesses are constantly told they need policies of every kind: health and safety, compliance, equal opportunities, sustainability, and so forth. Brand guidelines, which govern the look and feel of communications, can seem like just another. In a large organisation they can be seen as a necessary evil. In an SME, however, there are often doubts about whether they are really required. In reality though, as brand extends to more and more of a company's activities, they have become more important than ever.

The 'brand book' is the document that pulls together all of the elements that are used to distinguish your business. These days it's more likely to be a PDF than the weighty printed manual of yesteryear, and to sit on your company server rather than the head of marketing's shelf. But it hasn't changed much over the years and it needs to.

At first glance it has eye-catching collections of logos, typefaces, colour swatches and images, with technical specifications, dimensioned examples and... lots of rules. But the initial excitement and anticipation often gives way to a sense of frustration – “I can't find what I need”; intimidation – “I don't understand what this means”; annoyance – “It's out of date”. Strategic positioning statements, tone of voice and guidance on interactive media are often missing. At this point, there can be a hundred million reasons to walk away.

In all likelihood, the guidelines' content has been determined by the designer or agency who developed the brand. It's set out for other professionals to understand: for printers and web designers, advertising agencies and sign makers. Which is important, because these are the people who create many of the tangible manifestations of a brand. But more and more business-critical materials are generated internally: proposals, presentations, reports, product specifications and price lists, instructions and manuals – even blogs. Brand is no longer just confined to marketing: every department from finance to operations is now producing important communications.

In today's organisations – from the biggest multinationals to the smallest family businesses – brand is the experience people have with you. From this point of view, every member of your staff is a brand ambassador. Guidelines must engage them too: to demonstrate, instruct, entertain and guide, helping them to learn all about your brand. The brand book needs to explain how it applies to the jobs they do, so that they can embody its principles in their interactions with customers, suppliers, investors and others. The 'Aha! That's why it is important!' is the one good reason to stay.

BRAND GUIDELINES – finding the one good reason *continued...*

Great brand guidelines pull you in, ignite your senses – make you want to read more. Along with the visual identity, these tools and information need to include the many ways in which your people can help to build the brand. They tell a compelling story. A story that's worth reading because it explains the background, sets out where you are now and offers a vision of where you are going.

You have a brand – every organisation does – but do you have guidelines which describe your brand's purpose and how it works? Do they engage your people? And, most importantly, are they living it?

To us at VGROUP, working with businesses of all kinds, looking after your brand is like looking after your home. Businesses, like houses, come in all shapes and sizes. They are by no means all the same, even if they have common features. But one thing is true for all, and that is that their value at the point of sale – like that of property – is often disproportionately influenced by first impressions. When you come to sell a house, it's the outward things which give the buyer clues about what they can't see. The quality of the fixtures, the state of the decoration – even the smell of freshly-brewed coffee in the kitchen – are what we use to judge whether it been well been cared for. So it is with a company. No matter what sector or size, it's the state of its brand that tells us what shape it is in.

The state of a brand depends on how assiduously it is nurtured, maintained and valued. Everybody has a role in looking after it and brand guidelines make this possible.

*"Can't you give me what I'm needin', needin'
... every heartbreak makes it hard to keep the faith."*

*Million Reasons lyrics © Sony/ATV Music Publishing LLC

If you would like to talk about your company's brand and brand guidelines, drop Richard a line at hello@vgroup.com

Another Acumen by VGROUP that you might like.



**The meaning of brand
and why it matters**
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