



BAKER STREET
DIGITAL MEDIA



BRAND PERSONA
WORKBOOK

BRAND PERSONALITY: AN INTRODUCTION

“Businesses that commit themselves to crafting a highly defined brand personality gain a larger market share, higher return on investment and enjoy a continuity that lasts.”

— Trey Gafford

To get ahead in a crowded marketplace, your brand needs a strong, unique, and ownable personality. This personality should reflect your company’s core values or beliefs, and it will become the basis for all of your communication efforts.

From the outset, it’s important to recognize that every brand or company has a personality— whether you choose to define one or not. After all, having “no personality” is still a kind of personality.

Unfortunately, many brands suffer from exactly this problem, and it’s usually because the personality is being defined by everyone and no one at the same time. In other words, if every piece of communication bears the mark of the person who created it, then no one has actually defined a unified personality. The message becomes muddled and inconsistent. The brand suffers.

HOW VS WHAT

One way to think about brand personality is that it guides how you communicate, not what you communicate. Most companies are good at describing the what, but stumble when it comes to the how.

This is critical when we think about applying the brand personality to your communications efforts. It will help you assess the effectiveness of a campaign, because rather than just “liking” or “disliking” the idea, you can ask if it aligns with your personality. For example, is this TV spot funny? Honest? Authoritative?



WHY “PERSONALITY”?

It may sound odd to talk about a company as though it were a person, but there’s a very good reason marketers think about it this way: people have a natural ability to communicate with other people.

Plenty of ads and marketing materials fall flat because they speak from the brain, not the heart. And the strongest brands are successful not (just) because they offer better features or a lower price. Rather, they are able to connect with people on a human level and form a lasting relationship. They do this by speaking to people and not at them.

Some marketers describe this process by using the metaphor of a crowd. When a crowd talks to a single person, they tend to yell (just think of a referee who blows a call). Similarly, when a single person addresses a crowd, they also yell because it’s the only way they’ll be heard. The result is that no real relationship is formed, and nobody is inspired to do anything differently.

As we’ll see, forming lasting relationships with customers is at the heart of building an enduring brand—but sometimes that’s easier said than done.

STAND BY YOUR BRAND

Before diving into guidelines for developing your brand personality and some common pitfalls to watch out for, it’s essential to understand that brand personality is a long-term commitment. It should not change with the seasons or be subject to the whims of sales numbers.

We’ve all been there: the quarter is ending and sales figures are falling short of goals. The long-term health of the brand falls victim to the short-term demands of management. In these situations, it’s tempting to do whatever needs to be done to drive sales and meet your numbers. But ask yourself if you’re trading valuable long-term customer relationships for short-term profits. If your brand personality is strong, it will weather the storm.

GUIDELINES AND PITFALLS: DEFINING YOUR BRAND'S PERSONALITY

1 **AUTHENTICITY**

ONLY YOU CAN DEFINE YOUR BRAND'S PERSONALITY

The most important thing to keep in mind as you define your brand's personality is that it must ring true and it must come from within. Often companies look to outside parties like ad agencies or branding consultants to do this work for them. But while these companies can offer expertise and a refreshing outside perspective on your business, the final decision must come from within. After all, only you can define what your company really stands for—and you'll have to live with the results.



BEWARE OF IDEALIZING YOUR BRAND

There's an old adage in advertising: you can't be all things to all people. Of course we all want our brand to be defined by positive traits. But it must also feel real.

A common mistake is idealizing or romanticizing your brand, selecting a laundry list of positive, aspirational traits and calling that your personality.

For example, words like "bold," "compassionate," and "rational" all sound positive in isolation. But ask yourself if a person—perhaps a leader within your organization—can actually embody these traits at the same time. Are there situations in which you have to sacrifice one for the other? Ultimately you must decide what matters most to you and your brand.

FLASH VS SUBSTANCE

Another common pitfall? Focusing on flash without substance. During the internet boom of the late 90s and early 2000s, a lot of companies were so eager to stand out that they pursued big, flashy, provocative campaigns that weren't backed up by the substance of what the company actually did.

There's nothing wrong with being provocative, and this has been a successful strategy for many brands. But the product itself must be provocative to warrant this approach—an accounting firm and a skateboard company have different products and customers, and the personality should reflect that.

The flipside of this issue is playing it too safe and shying away from strong, assertive personality traits for fear of alienating audiences. Think of the people you've known in your life—someone with no strong opinions, preferences, or beliefs may be perfectly nice, but they're also boring. Standing out from the crowd means taking a stance, and maybe even a risk.

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EMOTION TRUMPS INFORMATION

PRODUCT ATTRIBUTES VS BRAND PERSONALITY

Customers have always been drawn to what's new. Whether it's a totally new product or an improved version of an existing one, it's natural to want the best. But the US economy has evolved in such a way that the rapid pace of these improvements creates a level playing field. For example, if Company A creates a mobile device with more memory, you can be sure that Company B will do the same within a short time. As a result, relying solely on your product's attributes and advantages is shortsighted.

As much as we like to think that people are rational and driven by information and data, the reality is that people form relationships to brands on an emotional level. Think about your favorite soft drink. Have you performed blind taste-tests of every available soft drink? Have you done a rigorous comparison of their ingredients? In most cases, the response is closer to "I just like it better." And that's fine.

CONTEXT COUNTS

When you think about a particular personality trait, it's important to keep in mind all of the associations and perceptions your audience may already have with that trait. This is why cultural reference points can be so effective in marketing. Marlboro created one of the most iconic brands in history by leveraging the icon of the cowboy. Yes, they literally used a cowboy in their ads, but this icon also taps into the American mythology of the "Wild West" and everything people associate with it, like individuality, toughness, and masculinity.

To take another example, consider Apple's long-running "Think different" campaign. By using famous innovators, from Einstein to Gandhi, they capitalized on our sense of curiosity, discovery, and fearlessness, connecting those values back to the brand. By contrast, you must also ask if the traits and icons you're thinking of really reflect your brand.

GUIDELINES AND PITFALLS: DEFINING YOUR BRAND'S PERSONALITY

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CONSISTENCY, CONSISTENCY, CONSISTENCY.

Alongside authenticity, consistency is one of the most important aspects of brand personality. A common temptation is to allow your brand to become a “chameleon,” changing your message and tone anytime you address a different audience.

Think about national politicians who change their position on an issue every time new polling data becomes available—they seem unreliable or dishonest, right? We admire leaders who have conviction and stand behind their beliefs, and brands work the same way.

If you try to be funny and provocative in communications to younger audiences, but conservative and level-headed when addressing older audiences, you'll lose both. Instead, think about who you really want to build a relationship with, and stick with it.



Answer the following questions and discuss them with your team. As you'll see, the goal of this exercise is to start general and get more specific. Identify the big-picture ideas first, then challenge them by exploring the deeper meanings behind the traits you choose.

1. Is your brand
 - male?
 - female?
 - neither?

2. Is your brand
 - young?
 - middle-aged?
 - old?
 - for all ages?

3. Is your brand
 - sophisticated?
 - mainstream?
 - down-home?

4. Is your brand
 - local
 - regional?
 - national?
 - global?

BRAND PERSONALITY WORKSHEET

What is your brand's story?

What problems currently exist with your brand identity?

What issue do you solve?

BRAND PERSONALITY WORKSHEET

What are five words that describe your brand?

What is your competition?

What sets you apart?

Who is your ideal customer?

BRAND PERSONALITY WORKSHEET

Why do your clients trust you?

What are you trying to achieve with your brand?

PAGES FOR YOUR THOUGHTS

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