

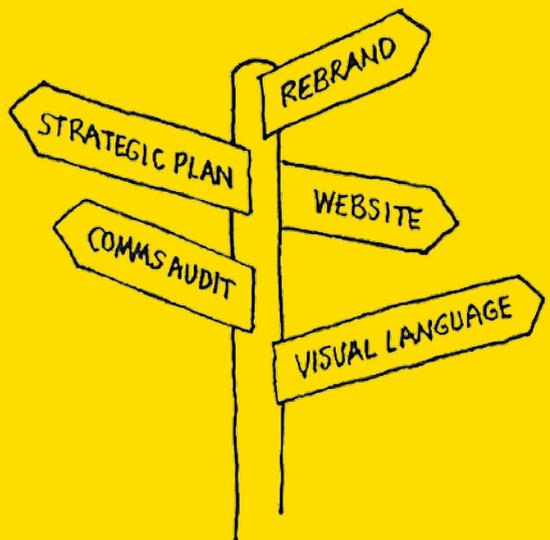
Branding in the real world

Our eight-point guide to making your brand work harder (or proving you need to)

Gaining buy-in to invest in your brand is challenging. We believe that the path to great results is just as much about navigating these challenges successfully as it is about the brand work itself.

So we've gathered together a handful of those we hear most often to give you our top tips for meeting them head on and addressing them.

Branding in the real world is no picnic. But our thinking can help make it a piece of cake.



“But how can I prove it’s worth doing?”

By holding up a mirror

Sometimes you only need to take the first step to prove the point. There’s no need to commission the full re-brand from day one. And you may not need to. Instead, consider securing a more achievable budget to review how well your brand is performing. For example, an initial perceptions study and communications audit of your own brand and that of your competitors. It’s hard to argue the value of reviewing how your brand’s performing in the eyes of your customers, your people and against the competition. And you never know, you might be pleasantly surprised. And, if not, you have compelling evidence for how and where you need to invest further.

“But the CEO thinks brand is all about re-arranging the cushions”

Link it back to the demands of the strategic plan

Your brand strategy and business strategy should be intrinsically linked: whether you’re developing your brand to help you deliver on your business strategy, or to help shape it. Be clear about the relationship between the two - and the advantage the investment is going to help you achieve. If that link’s not made clear, don’t blame CEOs for being skeptical or giving a subjective response to any ensuing work. To overcome this, we often help our clients build the business case before we help them build the brand.

“But now isn’t the right time”

There’ll never be a right time...

With lots of other initiatives on the go, there’ll always be a reason why “we can’t look at that now”. But improving an element of your brand can be done as part of something else that IS top of the agenda (e.g. developing your messaging and visual language through the delivery of your new corporate brochure).

...ah, but sometimes it isn’t

However, being the one to say “now’s not the right time” can sometimes be the right call. Making refinements to your brand when the fundamental business strategy is under review, for example, doesn’t make sense. Earn yourself Brownie points and the permission to do a more impactful (and a more appropriate) piece of work further down the line by calling it when, strategically, it doesn’t make sense.

“But my budgets are allocated elsewhere”

Then let's build it bottom up rather than top down

Whether it's because the Board “doesn't believe in brand” or because the brand budget has already been spent, there are clever ways in. Much can be done to develop your brand expression as part of developing key communications where budgets have been allocated. This could be your corporate brochure, annual report or website. These all provide high profile channels for developing your messaging, tone of voice and visual language. Another excellent way to secure the buy-in is through developing your sales tools and bid documents. With direct commercial value that's much easier to measure, it's easier to make the business case for improving these and making them work harder for you.

“But we can't change the logo”

You probably don't need to

Your brand is about more than your visual identity. So improving your brand might not involve anything visual at all (but instead clearly defining what makes you special, engaging all your stakeholders with that and evidencing it). And if a visual refresh is needed, much can be done without touching the logo, but instead refreshing the visual language that sits around it. The key is defining what you're trying to achieve, the parameters that are fixed and building the creative brief around this.

“But brand isn't taken seriously here”

Explain what brand is and what it means to them

Brand and good business sense are not mutually exclusive. Brand is, in part, about ensuring you manage the impression you make through your communications, rather than leaving it to chance. But it's about much more than that. To get people on board you need to demystify the word 'brand' - explain why it's important for the business and therefore why it's important for them. Link it clearly back to their role - how it will benefit them, what's expected of them and how it will ultimately help them and make their life easier. And engage them in the process so they feel part of it from the beginning.



“But brand is managed out of the US”

Build something that works within the parameters of the guidelines

Cultural nuance is a part of day-to-day business for global firms. Just as we might subtly modify our behaviour across territories, we should expect the same with our brand (emphasis on the word ‘subtly’). It’s a cliché, but you can’t be global without being local – you have to understand what resonates with your audiences in different places. So the brand may be managed out of the US, but to make it work in EMEA, the messaging, tone and execution may need to be nuanced. And there’s ALWAYS a way of doing that, somehow, within the existing guidelines.

“But what if people criticise what we’re doing?”

Be robust. Stand firm. Bide your time.

If you make changes to your brand, it’s always possible that some people will criticise it. Managing the possibility of this is part of branding. Designing the right engagement programme and process is a fundamental part of the brand strategy. Tell people at the outset why you’re embarking on the work in the first place (and link it to the business plan), keep them up to speed along the way, ensure your work is robust and defensible, second guess the objections that will be raised and be sure to have a ready answer. And then stand firm, whatever the weather. A year after launch, you’ll find some of your biggest critics may even have slowly become your greatest advocates.

So in short, branding in the real world can be challenging, but with the right process strategy, as well as the right brand strategy and implementation, it’s possible to get there rather than giving up before you start. And as for where you start, it’s about finding the right ‘partner’ (not ‘supplier’). Someone who appreciates it may not be a picnic, but will be able to not only know what the right destination is, but know how to get you there too.

There’s always a way forward, whatever the challenge. So why not call us and challenge us with yours.

If you want to know more, contact **Michael Coleman** at **Frank, Bright & Abel** on **+44 (0)20 7833 6444** or email **m.coleman@frankbrightabel.com**

Frank, Bright & Abel is a creative communications consultancy, providing strategy, design and delivery to higher education, business-to-business and financial services.