

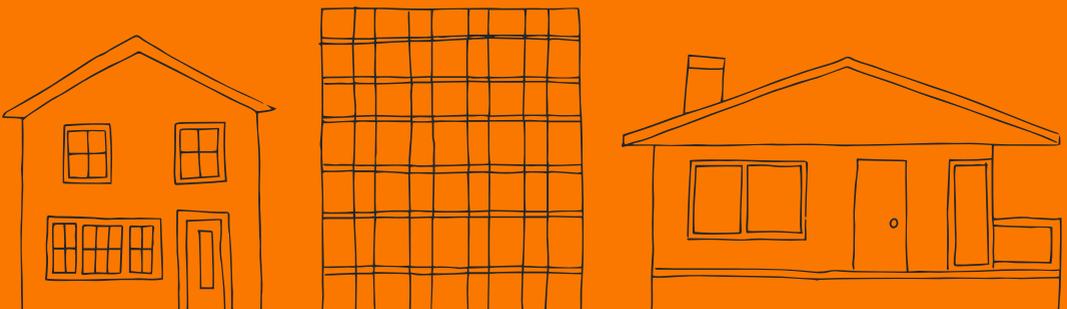
Brand architecture made easy

Brand architecture. Perhaps not at the top of most people's reading list, but definitely a thorny issue that needs addressing. Yet it often gets side-lined as too complicated or costly to fix. And you can understand why. New products, services, channels or customers; a change in leadership; mergers or acquisitions etc. All good reasons why brand portfolios become too unwieldy to manage.

At Frank, Bright and Abel, we're asked to help our clients with many different brand and communication challenges. Creating order within a family of brands is something we're being asked more and more, so we thought we'd share some of the lessons we've learnt to try and demystify this dark art.

Brand architecture is generally described as a way to organise the relationship between different brands within the same portfolio so that it makes it easier for your customers to understand you and find what they want. To achieve this, you'll first have to unravel all your brands. Once you've done this, what's the best structure to put them together again, and if that means changing some brands, how do you take people with you who are going to be affected?

Here are eight principles that will make brand architecture more successful, and hopefully less daunting.

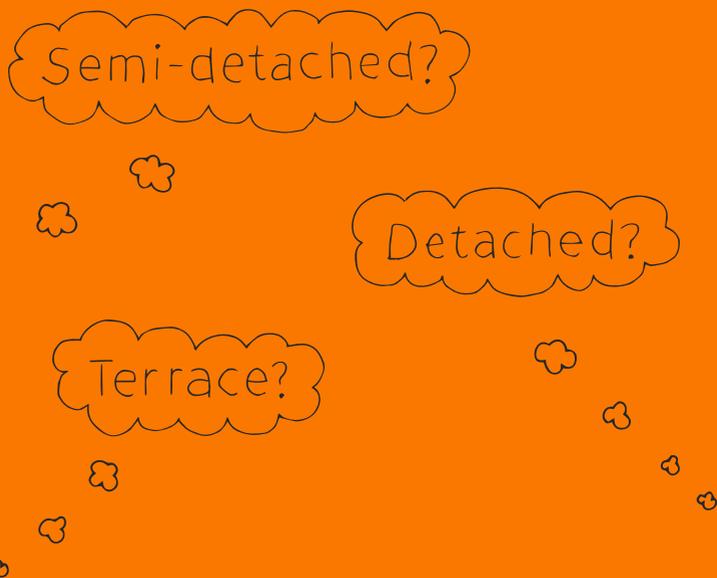


1. Reflect your business strategy

Brands need to reflect your business strategy. They can be organised in different ways across a spectrum to do this, from a masterbrand to a house of brands approach with sub-brand and endorsed brand approaches in-between. The role the parent brand plays throughout your portfolio of brands determines the difference.

A masterbrand approach is dominated by the parent brand. It's usually an approach where a company wants to be known for one thing or lead in one sector. It's an efficient way to structure brands but, depending on the equity in the parent brand, will determine the halo effect on the rest of the brands in the portfolio. At the other end of the spectrum is the house of brands approach where individual brands have little apparent relationship to the parent brand. This allows for differentiation and brands to compete in the same category. The success of the individual brand can be used to build equity in the parent brand. However, it's a complex approach and costly to manage.

There isn't a right or a wrong answer. It's a question of what's right for your business and how the structure best supports your strategy.



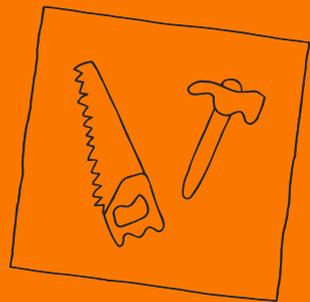
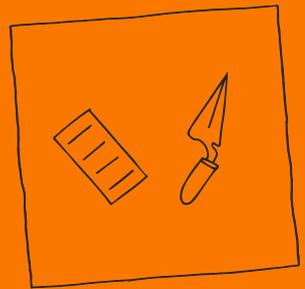
2. Get the right team in place

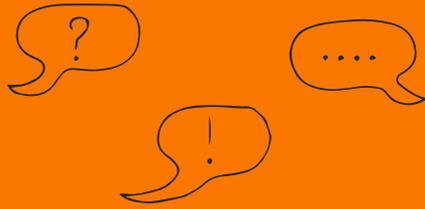
It's an obvious principle, but possibly the most important. Getting the right team in place is the difference between success and failure, especially when it comes to getting buy-in to the final solution.

The make-up of the project team should reflect the breadth of the organisation's brands whilst remaining a manageable size. If people can't be included because of numbers, they will need to be consulted with during the project. Understanding the history behind brands from all angles is important.

There will invariably be people who for whatever reason have done their own thing in the past and may be reluctant to change, or believe their brand is an exception. Try and get these people on board too but be prepared that there may come a point when the energy spent on them isn't helping and you have to move on. In this case, we've got some other tips later to help remove subjectivity from the process.

Ultimately brand architecture decisions need to be made at the top of an organisation as the impact could be significant. Whilst the project may be the responsibility of the marketing team, sign off is definitely a board level decision.





3. Talk to people

Only by talking to people will you understand where the true equity lies for each brand and therefore what the best structure is for your brands to reflect your business strategy. This will invariably involve a mix of well-informed staff who represent the brands on a daily basis, but more importantly customers who will give you a real sense of how the brands are perceived.

We have come across scenarios when the leaders of a business have wanted to build their parent brand, spent considerable sums on changing their visual identity and then wondered why the approach was not helping them as they'd hoped. They had overlooked the value of their individual brands. Only by talking to people did we find out the real picture. This meant we were able to convince the board that they could achieve their strategic goal more effectively by leveraging the equity in their individual brands to build recognition in their parent brand.

Research will give you the information you need to determine the best strategy.

4. Understand the landscape

It's important to map out the brands within the portfolio so you can get to grips with the extent of the task you're facing. Even if you don't know the full picture, gather as much information as you can: brands you know exist, anecdotal comments about brands that might exist, communication material, initiatives, etc.

Start piecing things together. Does anything group together? If so how? What's working and what's not? If you get more information as time goes by or discover a new brand that had been overlooked, include it in the picture. Apart from trying to understand the landscape, this is usually a great exercise to flesh out and challenge assumptions and conventions that have existed. It will give you valuable information to inform and guide what system might be best moving forward.



5. Explore all options

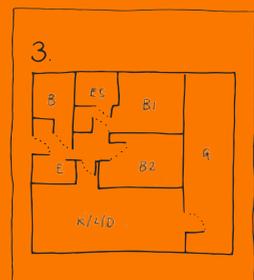
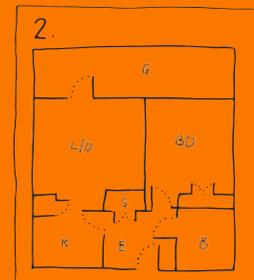
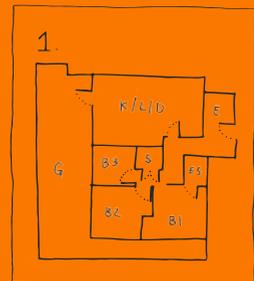
As part of your brand architecture strategy there may be a need to allow products and services to express their individuality. This is about creating a system that works for your business and exploring all options. Three common systems are based on function, customer type and proposition.

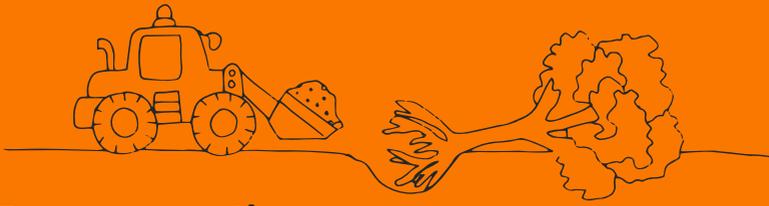
Insurance companies often structure their products and services by function. As a customer you will be asked to choose between household, car, travel insurance, etc. It's a very transactional approach and channels customers down a specific route. It ensures you find what you want, quickly and easily. Communication may have a slightly different look, feel and tone for each function.

Banks tend to structure their brands based on customer type. As a personal customer you will have a very different brand experience compared to a premier, business or international customer.

Many companies create their experience based on proposition. It's why someone would want to engage with the company. Membership organisations favour this approach. It creates a logical system for communication to feel different based on why you want to engage with the company. Collectively however, all communication unmistakably supports the overall brand strategy.

There's no right or wrong answer. It's about what's best for your customers. Whatever you do, do not let operational silos dictate. Too often we see brand systems that fit the company rather than making it easier for customers. The brands replicate operational silos and create confusion. If it doesn't make sense to you, it won't make sense for your customers.





6. Remove emotion

Deciding on which brands stay and which go, and the extent of the relationship to the parent brand is not an easy task. It's full of subjectivity and emotion.

Someone who has personally developed a brand over time will not be happy to be told they have to stop doing what they've done for years. Everyone will feel their brand is an exception to the rule.

How do you make an objective choice and remove emotion? Developing a series of objective questions with the project team will help. Questions should be based on what you know today and should support the business strategy. Turning them into closed yes/no questions means you've got the beginnings of a decision tree, and will help determine what's linked to the parent brand and what's an exception. Pour all the brands into the top and see where they end up. It's a vital tool that removes any emotion and ensures you're not back in the same situation in 12 months' time.

7. Think creatively

Brand architecture is ultimately a creative challenge. The strategy can help set the direction but working through the finer detail of the visual relationship between brands comes down to creativity.

Let's just say the strategy is for the parent brand and sub brand to have a closer relationship with each other, whilst letting the sub brands express their individuality. There are many ways this could occur. There's the hierarchy of information to consider. What's the proximity of parent brand and sub brand? Do they sit at the same level? Are they separated? Do they both have the same typeface? Could the sub brand have its own typeface to express its individuality? Is there a graphic element to consider? If so, how does this work for each?

The answer lies in working through all variables and permutations to arrive at the solution that makes most sense strategically and aesthetically.



Oak



Knotty
Pine



Ash



Knotty
Hickory



Alder

8. Give something back

Far from removing creativity and freedom from someone who has previously been used to doing their own thing, many solutions we arrive at involve giving those individuals greater freedom to express themselves.

Clearly it depends on the approach, but for brands that have a parent brand and number of sub or endorsed brands, a framework can be created that sets the mandatory elements that support the parent brand. The space in-between these elements can be left for the individual brands, with guidance, to really express themselves and capture what makes them different. Rather than individual brands going off and doing their own thing, the overall impression is one of cohesion and professionalism across the whole portfolio.



Conclusion

The goal of brand architecture is to help brands express themselves, so they make sense for customers. It's about having a system that helps brands communicate in harmony rather than appearing fragmented. The results don't always look complicated. The journey to get there often is. These eight principles will help, but there will be more. Ultimately, it's about making the right choices with the right people throughout the journey.

If you're in a company with different brands that don't appear to fit together well, the chances are your customers are feeling a little confused, and you're missing an opportunity. If so, its time you took stock of your brand architecture.

If you've got a Galaxy of brands that you need to get to grips with, get in touch and let us help smooth things out.

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