

15 step brand development strategy for your business

tiller.



Are you looking to expand your client base and drive new revenue?

Are you struggling to market your business effectively?

Do you have a website that isn't driving results?

The solution to all three of these problems likely lies in part with problems with your brand or how you're expressing it on your website and in your other marketing activities.

This article is designed to walk you through the steps necessary to build (or rebuild) a potent, memorable brand that helps you drive new business and build customer loyalty. The principles and steps below are applicable in any industry whether you're selling to consumers or businesses.

If you're looking for more information on why brand strategy is important, we recommend you start here with [our previous brand strategy article](#).

But for those of you ready to learn the steps to building a great brand inside a proven [brand strategy](#) framework, let's dig in.

1. Clarify your business goals.

Your business is designed to sell a service or product and make a profit. Your brand is the customer-facing part of that business, the asset you use to convert potential clients into paying ones. You express your brand in many ways: on your website, in social media, in marketing materials, in conversations with customers, basically in any interaction a customer has with your company.

Your brand does a lot of heavy lifting for your business.

That's why it's important to understand what your business goals are before you proceed to develop a brand. Otherwise, how can the brand deliver the right messages and impressions to the market? A lot of businesses will start working on branding work before they've identified their business goals, which can create issues for them downstream.

So in building a brand, that's step one. Clarify your business goals.

There are different levels of clarity that will work depending on what kind of business or product you're launching.

A major brand or company launch might require a full multi-year business plan.

A smaller start-up could get by with a more focused list of goals for the initial stage of its lifespan. For example: it's useful to document what it is your business does, who you want to sell to, what kind of revenue growth you need in the first quarter or year of the business, what kind of employees you want to attract – all these things are important.

If you have clarity about your business goals the rest of the process will flow more smoothly.

And, of course, it's important these goals are measurable so you can track progress and make adjustments as you determine what is and isn't working over time.

2. Create your brand purpose.

The world is probably not as excited as you are about the forthcoming launch of your brand.

This is not meant to sound harsh.

It's actually quite freeing because it opens the door to digging deeper into why you're doing what you're doing, to finding that true brand purpose. It opens the door to the creation of a brand that can build a deeper connection with your audience. Because you aren't just assuming your brand is going to win hearts and minds in the market. You're going to do the work to make sure it does.

We covered some of the key elements of a brand purpose in our recent brand strategy post:

"What is your brand's core reason for existence? What's the mission you're on for your customers? How are you positioning your brand in the market? What values underpin the work you do day-to-day? What's your vision for the change your company will make in the world?"

Brand purpose is an important step and one where businesses should invest more time and thought than they often do.

Why?

Because the world is not as excited about the launch of your brand as you are.

But it could be.

3. Do a competitive review.

Arguably the most essential piece of your brand definition to get right is its differentiating points. What makes your brand special and valuable compared to your competitors? It's hard to make those choices without knowing what other companies are in-market, what story they're telling, what they're offering, what they've chosen to include on their website, and how the market is reacting to them.

By doing a competitive review, you can get a full view of the landscape in which you'll have to compete. By looking at multiple competitors, you might see an underserved piece of the market you can address when you launch your brand. And you'll be able to calibrate exactly how to position your brand for your customers and against your competitors.

4. Broadly define your audiences.

Who are you trying to reach with your brand? Is it one group of people or many? By the time you get to this step you should be able to identify the groups you'll need to communicate with to meet your business goals. These will, of course, include the eventual buyer of your product or service.

But your audience may be broader than that.

Do you need partner organizations to realize your vision? Are you looking to draw in venture capital to fund staff growth or new product development? Do you need to attract the attention of government or other public sector organizations?

Once you know your broad audiences, you're ready to get more specific about who these people are.

5. Create personas.

A persona creates a representation of your targeted customer(s) and stakeholder(s) that incorporates their key needs, problems, goals, and paints a picture of them demographically. In a disciplined marketing operation, everything you do – from website creation to campaign execution – is targeted at your personas. The exercise of creating personas forces you to drill down on your broad audience, get specific and create an avatar for the actual person that you're trying to reach.

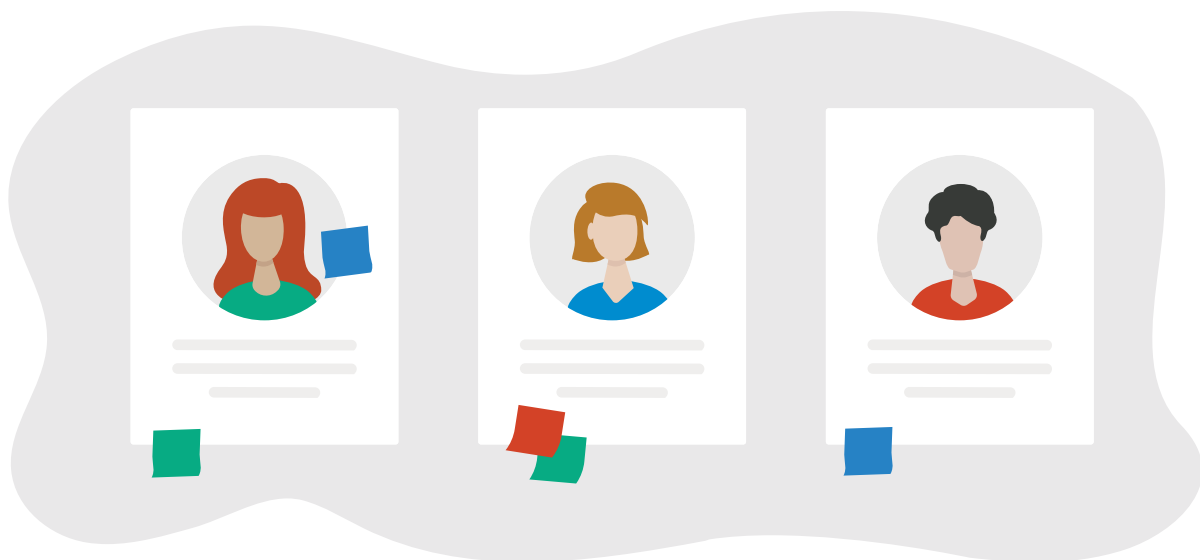
For example:

- In a B2B company that sells marketing technology to large consumer-driven enterprises, a key persona might be a 45-year-old Marketing Director, who has a goal of growing her brand in a new market but who is struggling to connect to

consumers and understand their needs. This person might also be overwhelmed by all the marketing technology on offer.

- In a B2C company that is launching a fast casual vegan food restaurant, a key persona might be a 30-year-old professional who wants to eat super healthy but it strapped for time to cook. This professional may already be highly loyal to existing restaurants that cater to vegans.

The better you know your audience, through personas, the more effectively you can craft a brand that will appeal to them.



6. Define your brand differentiators.

We also touched on brand differentiators in that previous brand strategy post we mentioned earlier. Let's highlight one particular insight again because it's so important:

"...the disciplined, strategic marketing of the *wrong* differentiator can cost you months or years of time – and thousands of dollars."

Knowing what makes your brand different and special and uniquely valuable is of almost incalculable importance. It's one of the pillars you must dig in on and get right.

So how do you do that?

By this point in the brand development process, you know who your audience is and what your competitive landscape looks like. The key to effective selection of your brand's differentiators is to satisfy and speak to that specifically defined audience. And what you'll then offer them is something that stands out as being new ("This is exciting, I haven't seen this before") or better ("This finally fixes the problem I have with existing providers of this kind of product or service") or elevated ("This is just like what I'm buying now but far better").

Note that some brands are differentiated by one single factor and that's enough to give them a competitive advantage and win in the marketplace. But you may find you need to differentiate in more than one area.

Once you have your differentiators, you have the basis for the story you'll present to the market, again and again, through different marketing vehicles. And just as important – you have a fundamental piece of content you'll use as you further develop your brand and eventually your website.

7. Finalize your brand positioning.

At this point you've done a significant amount of strategic work in the brand development process. Now you're getting closer to actually bringing it to life. But before you move into some of the more creative elements of your brand building work, it's a good time to summarize exactly what your brand positioning is in a single statement. And that's the goal. Boil everything up to one single statement of offering and value. It's what you might use to introduce your company to someone you meet at a conference or to a consumer who might be interested in buying what you're selling.

For example, at Tiller our brand positioning statement is:

"We're a design and development agency that builds high quality brands, websites and digital experiences that will take your brand to the next level."

This is a good time to agonize over the specific words you choose for your positioning statement. Precision is important here as you are working with what is effectively the DNA of your brand in its most compact form.

8. Create your key messaging.

Key messaging is a list of messages you want to get across to your target audiences and personas. It's not every detail of every product or a comprehensive rundown of your company. It's just the key ideas you want to communicate; the things you want people to remember above all else. Key messages documents vary by the size of a company or brand but can sometimes be as short as a couple of pages.

Key messages are material that communications professionals will often use to produce press releases or to build external presentations or to field media inquiries. And you can use key messages for those things too. But for the purposes of building a strong brand, developing key messages is a way to get alignment on the story you're telling and give your copywriters and designers and other creative people the raw material to do their very best work when they go to bring your brand to life.

9. Develop your brand voice.

Brand voice is a creative component of your brand.

Brand voice is sometimes a tricky element to get your head around, particularly if you haven't worked with brand definition processes in the past. Brand voice is not what you say but how you say it. It's the summary of the tone and personality and feel of how you communicate— and the overall impression these things deliver to your customers and other important stakeholders.

Some brand voices are cheeky and punchy. Others are dead serious and grave. Others still are knowledgeable and personable.

If you think about it, you could deliver the exact same piece of information about a product, service or company in any of the above ways. And they'd all feel quite different. That's brand voice.

A defined brand voice is necessary for a copywriter to produce the writing for your website or advertisements. It's necessary for any agency to produce creative work of any kind that represents your brand in a consistent, compelling way for your audiences.

Don't find your brand voice as you go. Define it early and reinforce it.

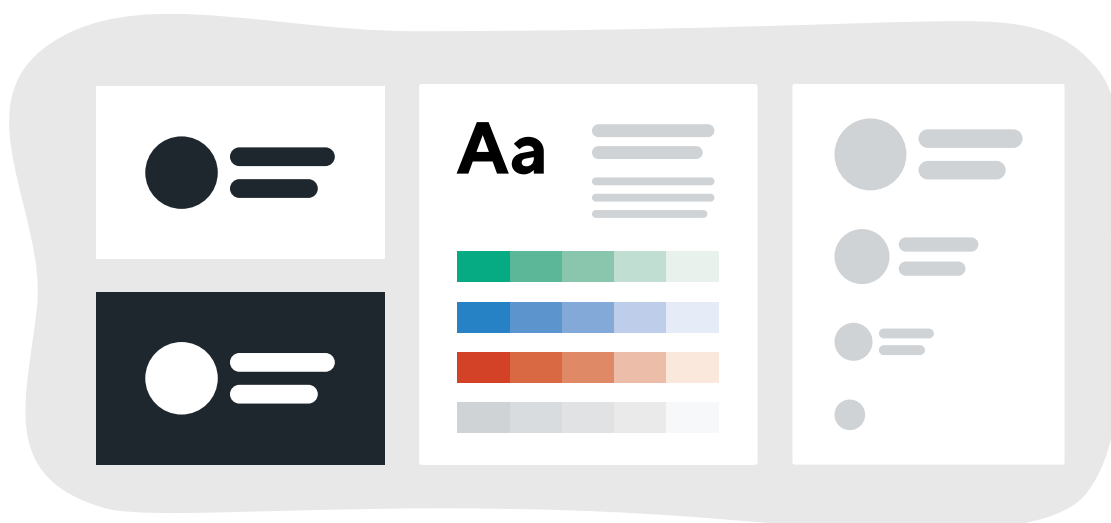
10. Create a visual brand identity.

So here's where you'll create, update, or recreate your logo, but that's not all we do in this step.

Your visual brand identity encompasses your logo, which might have different variations for different uses. But it also goes beyond that, because it includes things like a defined colour palette for your brand and the specific typographical choices you'll use as part of your website and other marketing activities.

If you're creating a tagline to be presented with your logo, it will be done here so the two work harmoniously together.

From a process perspective, visual brand identity is informed by the things that came before it in this process like the brand voice work in step #9. And it then informs the work that happens next, as you build out your [brand guidelines](#).



11. Create your brand guidelines.

Your brand guidelines are effectively a style guide that outlines how your brand should be used in different contexts.

They are typically heavily focused on creating usage rules for your visual brand, including things like logo usage, logo placement, brand colours, iconography, illustration and font choices.

A full set of brand guidelines also incorporates guidance on how to apply your brand voice and any specific direction around messaging or language for your brand.

You should be able to hand your completed brand guidelines to an agency or a creative resource (writer, designer, developer, videographer, etc.) to ensure their work represents your brand in the manner you intend, one that's cohesive across all platforms and mediums.

12. Create your primary brand collateral.

As you launch your brand, you'll want some core brand collateral to support it.

For a physical consumer product that could mean designing packaging for your initial product rollout and perhaps visual assets for billboards, newspaper advertisements or digital and social media spaces. It really depends on what you're doing at launch and what you're selling.

For a business-to-business product you may need additional items like sales decks and info sheets and other materials to help you make the case for your product with your target audiences.

In both cases you'll probably also want business cards, letterhead and maybe even some apparel to give away.

The key point here is you'll want some primary assets built (according to your brand guidelines of course!) that enable you to launch your business, build credibility with your targeted audiences and convert the initial round of prospects into sales. Down the road you can produce additional material as you need it.

13. Design, write and build your website or application.

Here's a general overview of the process a digital agency will take you through from first inspiration to final go-live. Some of these steps have multiple sub-steps inside them but an agency will smoothly walk you through them if you haven't been through this process before.

1. Website and application design – Here you outline the goals and strategy for your website or app, incorporating much of the work that took place in steps #1-12. You go through a number of iterative creative steps in this process, including wireframing, where informational architecture and user flows for the site are broken out at a high level, and more detailed work in UI and UX (we wrote in detail about [the differences between UI and UX in this article](#)). The copy is also written during this phase – which helps inform the design. By the end of it, there's a clear handoff of finished copy and finished designs to the development team, and then they go to work.
2. Website and application development – Here the development team (and it usually is a team) develops a technical strategy to realize the design and copy presented to them. Then they code out the site, optimize for search engines, incorporate a content management system if necessary and, once the site is built, go through a quality assurance process to make sure every pixel looks the way it should. And that's when you go live.

We'll eventually do a longer article on the website creation process but we do have other resources if you're looking for more information right now.

To learn more about website design, you can visit our [Web Design page here](#).

To learn more about website development, you can visit our [Web Development page here](#).

14. Create a marketing plan.

You should have some initial marketing and communications activities planned for the launch of your brand and website (which is why you'll sometimes hear the phrase 'launch week' or 'launch month' in reference to a website go-live; it often kicks off the initial presentation of a brand and business to the world).

You will also want a longer term marketing plan. Remember that your audience is only just getting to know you, so you'll want a regularly scheduled series of marketing activities to get them interested in your brand and your business. Give them a reason to stick around!

Ultimately, marketing plans can be simple or vast, depending on the resources you want to allocate and the relative importance of marketing in your sales and business development process.

15. Go through ongoing measurements and make adjustments.

Brand building takes time and patience.

You're going to learn a lot as you go and in order to be able to effectively act on what you learn, you're going to want to measure the response to your brand and your marketing work. So make sure you set some goals in targeted areas and track your progress towards them. You can do this alone, leveraging tools like Google Analytics or any number of marketing technologies, or with the support of an agency, which can manage everything for you.

The point is to stay focused, to leverage and nurture the brand you've built, and learn as you go. That's the path to a brand that your audience won't forget.

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strategy for your business?**

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