



Practical guide: Create a brand strategy

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What a brand strategy decides

Your brand is what people expect from you before they buy and what they remember after. A brand strategy is the short set of decisions that shapes those expectations on purpose.

It answers three questions. Who are we for? What do we stand for? Why should a customer choose us rather than the alternatives?

A working brand strategy fits on one page. If it needs thirty, the decisions have not been made yet.

What it is not

It is not the logo. Name, logo, colours and typefaces are the brand identity. Identity expresses the strategy, and commissioning it first is the most expensive mistake in this guide, because you pay twice.

It is not a slogan, and it is not the marketing plan. The plan changes every year. The strategy should not.



What a brand strategy does for the numbers

Three findings that have held for more than a decade, and one change in how customers find you that is much newer.

It produces the growth that lasts

Les Binet and Peter Field, analysing several hundred campaigns for the IPA (The Long and the Short of It, 2013), found that brand building produced the larger share of long-term sales growth and price resilience. Their recommended balance for most categories was roughly 60 per cent brand, 40 per cent activation.

Customers buy what comes to mind

Byron Sharp's How Brands Grow (2010) shows that brands grow mainly by being thought of in more buying situations and by being easy to buy. A strategy decides what you want to be remembered for.

A clear brand holds its price

The discount is what a weak brand pays for a customer's attention. A clear one is paid for attention it already has. In every market I have worked in, the businesses that could say who they were for did not have to match a competitor's price cut.

AI tools quote what is written about you

McKinsey's State of the Consumer 2026 found that only 1 per cent of the sources AI tools cite about companies come from the company's own website. When you have decided what you stand for and repeated it, that is what the tools find.



The five decisions to make

A brand strategy is five decisions, made in this order. Each one narrows the next. The question under each heading is the one I ask first in a workshop.

Audience

Who are we for, and who are we not for?

Describe the customer who is most profitable to serve and most likely to recommend you, by their situation rather than their demographics. Then write down who you will decline. A brand for everyone is remembered by no one.

Position

Where do we sit against the alternatives?

Choose the category customers file you under, then the single attribute you will own inside it. It has to be valued, provable, and not already claimed by the leaders. "Quality" and "service" fail that last test almost everywhere.

Proposition

Why should they choose us?

One sentence that says what the customer gets from you that they would not get elsewhere, followed by the proof. Without proof a proposition is a claim, and customers have heard every claim.



The five decisions to make

Character

How do we behave and how do we sound?

Three values, each written as a behaviour your staff can be held to, and a tone of voice in four words with an example of each. "We answer every enquiry within one working day, including the ones we decline" is a value. "Integrity" is a word.

Expression

What makes us recognisable?

Only now the name, logo, colours, typefaces and the two or three distinctive assets you will repeat until people know you without reading the name. This is where a designer earns their fee, and the brief they need is the four decisions above. In the UAE, decide here how the brand works in Arabic and English.

Why the order matters

1 Audience	One paragraph, and one line on who you decline
2 Position	Category, one attribute, two named competitors
3 Proposition	One sentence and three proofs
4 Character	Three behaviours, four tone words
5 Expression	Identity guidelines and distinctive assets

Decisions one to four are yours to make. Decision five is the only one to pay a designer for, and the one most businesses start with.



Actions to write your brand strategy

01

Gather the evidence

Talk to ten customers: five you would like to clone and five who did not come back. Ask what they were trying to do, what else they considered and how they would describe you to a friend.

Read the last fifty reviews and twenty lost sales. Save every phrase that repeats.

02

Map the competitors on what buyers compare

Take the two things customers said they compare on, draw them as axes and place yourself and five competitors.

You are looking for the space nobody credibly occupies that customers still value.

03

Choose the audience

Write the paragraph describing your priority customer by situation, and the line on who you decline.

Check it against the sales figures. The priority customer should be profitable today, or clearly becoming so.

04

Write the position and the proposition

For [customer] who [need], [business] is the [category] that [single benefit], because [three proofs].

Write five versions, read them aloud, and delete any word a competitor could also use.

Actions to write your brand strategy

05

Test it on five customers and five staff

Read the sentence aloud and ask three questions: is it true, is it different, does it matter to you.

Two or more "no" answers to any question sends you back to step four. This is the cheapest test in marketing and the most often skipped.

06

Set the character

Three values as behaviours, each with a line on what it costs you to keep it. Four tone words, each with an example sentence.

Give the page to whoever writes for the business and whoever answers the phone.

07

Brief the designer with decisions one to four

List the two or three distinctive assets you will repeat everywhere. Ask for guidelines a new supplier could follow without explanation.

Budget in the UAE: roughly AED 15,000 to 60,000 (GBP 3,200 to 12,800) for a small-business identity from a competent independent designer.

08

Write the one page and put a date on it

Fill the template on page 9. Choose three measures from page 10 and record today's figure for each.

Tell every member of staff what changed and why. Review once a year, and change it only when the evidence changes.

A worked example

A made-up Dubai interiors studio, eight staff, AED 6 million turnover, competing with forty others on Instagram. The names and figures are invented; the shape of the problem is one I see every month.

What the evidence said

Ten customers used the same three phrases: "they told me the real cost up front", "it was finished when they said", "I did not have to chase anyone". Lost sales were price comparisons against studios that quoted low and added extras later. The map of certainty against design ambition showed the ambitious end crowded and the certainty end empty.

The decisions

Audience. Homeowners renovating a home they will live in, who have been burned once by overruns. Not developers, not landlords.

Position. Residential interiors and fit-out. Attribute owned: cost and completion certainty.

Proposition. For homeowners in Dubai who want a renovation finished on the date and at the price agreed, Studio Meridian fixes both in writing before work starts, because every project has one quoted price with a 5 per cent cap on changes, a named manager, and 38 of the last 40 projects finished within a week of the date promised.

Character. We quote the full cost or we do not quote. We tell you bad news the day we learn it. Tone: plain, precise, warm, unhurried.

Expression. One deep green, a completion stamp on every finished-project photograph, and photography that always includes the family. Arabic and English on every printed piece.

The point

Nothing in the strategy required a new logo. The studio had been trying to look more ambitious than better-funded competitors. Its customers wanted something the competitors could not credibly promise.



The one-page brand strategy

Print this page or copy the headings into a document. Fill every box in plain sentences a new member of staff could understand on their first day.

1 · AUDIENCE: WHO WE ARE FOR, BY SITUATION

WHO WE DECLINE

2 · CATEGORY WE COMPETE IN

THE ONE ATTRIBUTE WE OWN

2 · POSITIONED AGAINST

3 · PROPOSITION, ONE SENTENCE

THREE PROOFS

4 · THREE VALUES, AS BEHAVIOURS

4 · TONE IN FOUR WORDS · WE NEVER

5 · DISTINCTIVE ASSETS WE REPEAT

MEASURES, TODAY'S FIGURE, REVIEW DATE

Mistakes to avoid and measures to keep

Six mistakes I see most often

- ☐ Starting with the logo, then paying for it twice.
- ☐ An audience of everyone, which describes the market and no customer.
- ☐ Owning "quality" or "service", which every competitor also claims.
- ☐ Copying the market leader into a position that is already taken.
- ☐ Rewriting it every year. Brands are built by repetition.
- ☐ Not telling the staff. The strategy lives in what the receptionist says.

Three measures, chosen from these

Record a baseline, then track quarterly. Brand effects take six to twelve months to show.

Unprompted awareness A short survey, twice a year

Branded search volume Google Search Console, monthly

Enquiries using your words Enquiry form and call notes

Average discount to close Sales records

Repeat and referral revenue Accounts or CRM

How AI tools describe you Ten questions, three tools, monthly

Sources

Binet and Field, The Long and the Short of It, IPA, 2013. Byron Sharp, How Brands Grow, Oxford University Press, 2010. McKinsey, State of the Consumer 2026, June 2026.



Conclusion

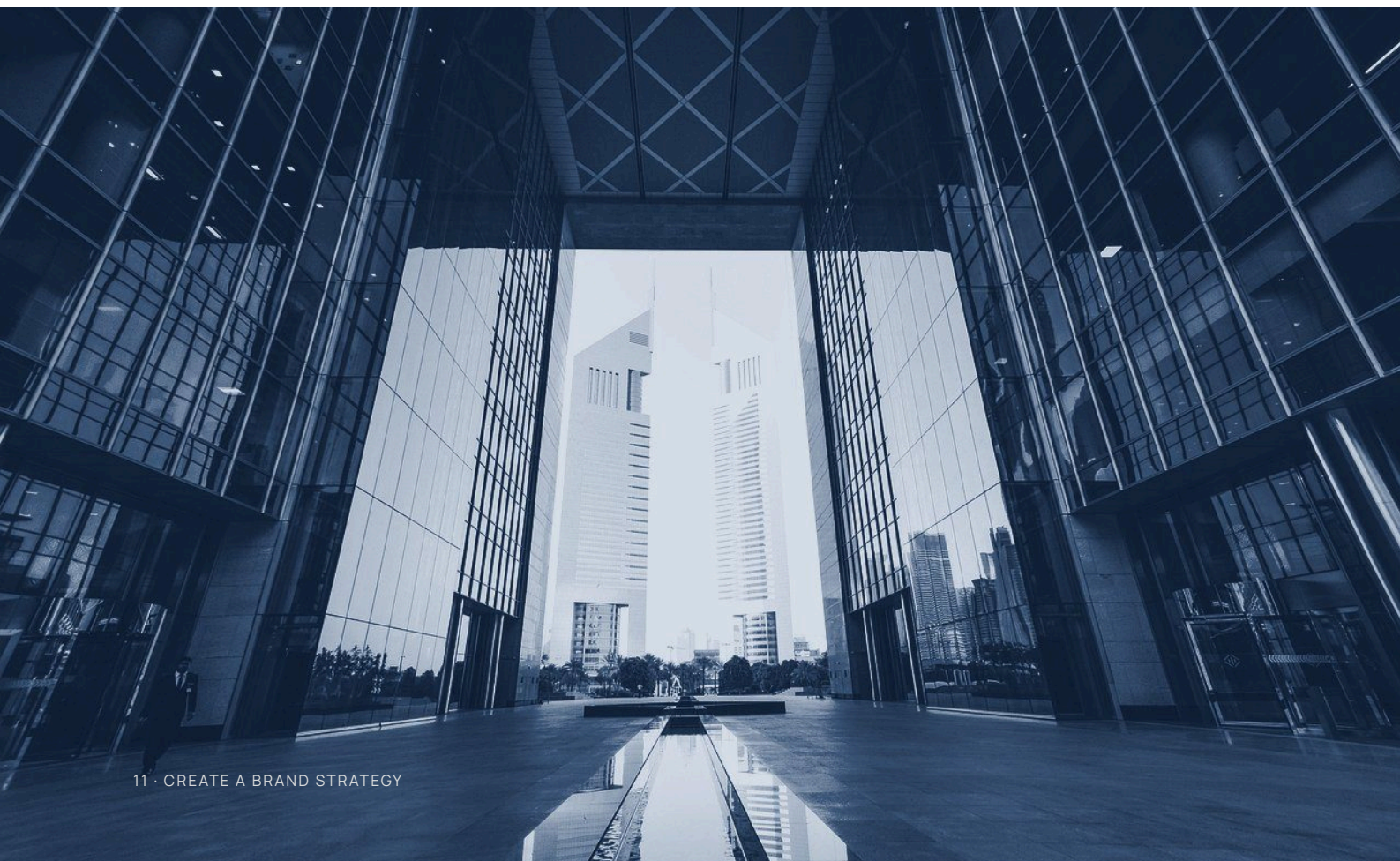
A brand strategy is the cheapest piece of marketing you will ever do, and the one that makes everything after it cheaper. It costs a few weeks of conversations and an afternoon of writing.

Make the five decisions in order, test the sentence on people who did not write it, and only then brief a designer.

Next step

If you would like a second opinion on your one page before you brief a designer, I offer a 30 minute discovery call at no charge. Bring the page and the evidence behind it.

Book at ataylorcmo.com, or write to adam@ataylorcmo.com.



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MSc, FCIM, CDMP. Fractional chief marketing officer, based in Dubai, with more than twenty years leading marketing in the UAE, the UK and internationally.

I have led marketing for destination, events, retail, business setup and loyalty businesses, including global brand experience at IFZA, the Dubai Fireworks at Burj Khalifa for Emaar, and 229 events across 182 days as Director of Events and Entertainment at Expo 2020 Dubai.

I am a Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Marketing and a Certified Digital Marketing Professional. I work with owners and leadership teams who need senior marketing direction without a full-time hire: an audit, a strategy the board signs off, and a few days a month to see it carried out.

This guide is one of a series written in plain English for business owners. Each ends with a template you can use the same day.

Contact

If you have a question about this guide, or want a second opinion on your brand strategy, write or call. I reply within one working day.

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