IMPULSE CREATIVE
Branding & Inbound Marketing

The Brand Plan

A BRAND MANUAL BLUEPRINT FROM VOICE TO VISUALS

They're our passions, our identities, our subcultures. They're the way you lace up your gym sneakers with intensity and determination. They're the smile on your face, and a warm, familiar feeling. They mark the chapters of your life, woven into the smallest details of every moment. They're the way you recognize your kind of people out in the world. They are the products and services that have achieved the highest honor and loftiest goal in all of marketing: transcending the consumer world and becoming a part of our happiness.

They are brands.

Maybe it begins with a logo and tagline. But it has to become so much more than that. The voices, faces and strategies of the brands in our lives were created with intricate, 360-degree planning. It takes an army of writers, designers and marketers to push a unified voice and style out into the world everyday. A brand manual is how they do it so well.

It doesn't really matter what your brand goals are, or even what you sell. Every brand journey begins here, by creating the operator's manual of your brand, in written, tangible instructions that explain exactly who you are and how you want to interact with the world. It is a blueprint of your identity, tone of voice, visual style and social interaction strategy. It's a real, live document you can slap down on a desk while saying, "This is who we are."

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GETTING STARTED

It's very likely you already have some existing graphic, editorial and brand identity guidelines. Now is your chance to finish the puzzle with those pieces, as well as the new ones you'll create by following this simple plan for your brand. Review the following outline and begin taking an audit of what you may already have to answer these questions.

When you're ready to start filling in the blanks, take on one section at a time and get the entire relevant team involved. Use braindumps, brainstorms and open collaboration with the people who have to implement this brand every day.

The value of their boots-on-the-ground insight, and the loyalty this process instills in them, is priceless.

Build Your Brand Identity

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BUILDING YOUR BRAND IDENTITY

This is where the roots of your brand's personality live. Almost every business already has some form of this. Maybe you've hired a branding expert and created a brand house/pyramid/etc., with colorful graphics and presentations describing your brand in detail.

Most of you probably have a lengthy version in your employee handbook and business plans. Here's the thing about actually using that:

> If you want your brand mission, vision and values to be top-of-mind, you've got to keep them simple and accessible.

Brand manuals are where employees reference business details for practical use. This whole brand identity section should paint a quick picture of who you are, what you care about and where you're going. It's the foundation for the rest of your brand manual and something to guide you in making every other decision. So be sure to make this section clear and easy to understand. Don't leave anything up for interpretation.

Mission

Your mission should be a statement all about your company, goals and how you'll achieve them. The key here is brevity. This is a quick-guide, not a grant proposal. Try to get your mission down to one sentence. Remember, this is for internal use only, so feel free to omit things employees will already know, such as stating your specific products and services.

This section defines your purpose, the what and the who of your company, and hopefully inspires loyalty.

BUILDING YOUR BRAND IDENTITY

As always, there's a lot of ways to approach creating this. Don't be afraid to think differently. For example, Burt's Bees, a natural personal care product company, combines their mission and vision statements as they describe **"What We Are" and "What We're Not"**.

Get inspired by **12 vision and mission statements** from companies who really get it.

Vision

Your vision is the "why" of what you do, as well as a glance toward the future, and where (or what) you want to be. It's a good place to talk about world domination, having a legacy of great service or being the single, most-trusted provider of whatever it is that you do.

In short, why do you exist and what do want to accomplish? A powerful vision statement that's come to fruition will make customers know who you are without even saying your brand name.

Pop Quiz

Go ahead, guess the brand

A. To be Earth's most customer-centric company; to build a place where people can come to find and discover anything they might want to buy online.

B. To provide access to the world's information in one click.

C. To provide a brighter future for the galaxy by joining and supporting the Force of all rebels united against the Empire.

Answers: A. Amazon B. Google C. The Rebel Alliance

Core Values

What do you stand for?!

For listing core values, try to use no more than four. You can go into a bit more detail with a sentence or two explaining each. Type lightly though, as any more than that will be too cumbersome to use as an easy reference.

Drift does a great job of making **their values** simple and relatable. If you decide to opt out of creating a "Brand Filter", this set of words will serve a similar purpose for deciding whether content or your marketing efforts are "on brand."

Facebook uses core values you can see, everyday:

Be bold
Focus on impact
Move fast
Be open
Build social value

Build-A-Bear Workshop rocks their brand voice, even in one-word values:

Reach
Learn
Di-bear-sity
Colla-bear-ate
Give
Cele-bear-ate

Google's core values are longer, but simply stated to resonate and make an impact.

Focus on the user and all else will follow.
It's best to do one thing really, really well.
Fast is better than slow.
Democracy on the web works.
You don't need to be at your desk to need an answer.
You can make money without doing evil.
There's always more information out there.
The need for information crosses all borders.
You can be serious without a suit.
Great just isn't good enough.

Optional: Brand Filter

Bad things happen when a company or project strays too far away from your brand identity. It happens more easily and more often than you think.

Marketers and creatives, for example, love to get passionate about projects. Sometimes we spend weeks or months digging deep into an idea. Whether you're a cornerstone of the company or a new hire, it's easy to get lost in your creation and forget the reason it exists. On the flip side, you don't want anyone being afraid of taking a risk.

Keep all of your marketing "on brand" by creating a simple brand filter. Instead of charging a few authority figures with approval privileges, empower your team to screen their idea through the brand filter themselves. It'll breed creative confidence and a clearer direction for content.

Review your brand identity section to narrow down your mission, vision and values into no more than 5 words that represent the brand. They should reflect the personality of the brand in action. Some considerations here include your overall tone, purpose, motivation, values, culture, behaviors that support your mission or vision and the look and feel of the brand.

Think about it as your whole brand manual boiled down to a few words. Just keep it simple, specific, conveyable and remember, your brand manual is a living document that can always be changed.

Good brand filters can be used for product creation just as easily as they're used for content creation. Think about the brands you use everyday and keywords you'd use to describe them. It's that simple. It's even easier to realize what words are not in their brand filters. Lexus, for example, clearly doesn't use "quirky", but Volkswagen Beetle might.

Define Your Editorial Style Guide

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DEFINING YOUR EDITORIAL STYLE GUIDE

This section is one of the most overlooked details of a brand manual in companies around the world. However, when you stop to notice consistently awesome cross-platform messaging from a brand, you can bet your ass they didn't skip this section.

Words are assets, just like your design. A lot of thought should be put into using tone and words correctly and "on brand". Far more people are entrusted to speak or write on behalf of your company than to design for it. And due to the nature of writing, those people are probably not all going to be professional writers. Arm them with tools to recreate your brand voice, everywhere they need to.

> Even a few pages of guidelines, shared amongst your staff, will bring a cohesive voice to your company, strengthen your brand and help build the trust of your audience.

With a little planning, your whole organization can sound like a pro brand writer is behind it.

The following suggested sections can be as long or short as you need, just say everything you need to say. Think about it like creating the operator's manual for your brand communications. What would you need to tell another person about how to speak for your company if you weren't there? It's that simple.

General Brand Messaging

Are you going to use a lot of lists and bullets? Will you use humor? How about metaphors? Is your brand web-savvy enough that consumers will appreciate your use of internet acronyms like TLDR? Is your main communication objective to educate consumers? (If you're using the Inbound Marketing methodology, it should be!) Think of this section as general strategy for achieving your tone of voice.

Brainstorm with your writers and marketers to create your editorial style guide. Go through each of these sections and have a real discussion about translating your brand identity into a conversation. Make sure you're considering your **buyer personas** here, because, just like selling, if you're writing for everybody, you're writing for nobody.

Since this is a very internal document, it's tough to find many examples online. *Groupon's* was famously leaked and it's legendary. It's filled with examples and comprehensive points for achieving the absurd humor that's made them so successful. **Check it out**. Another awesome example is from **Mailchimp**. They even break down content by format.

Make a list of written content goals and principles that can apply to all of your formats and channels. Here's what *Mailchimp* did and it's fan-freaking-tastic:

Writing Goals and Principles

With every piece of content we publish, we aim to:

Empower. Help people understand MailChimp by using language that informs them and encourages them to make the most of our products.

Respect. Treat readers with the respect they deserve. Put yourself in their shoes, and don't patronize them. Remember that they have other things to do. Be considerate and inclusive. Don't market at people; communicate with them.

Educate. Tell readers what they need to know, not just what we want to say. Give them the exact information they need, along with opportunities to learn more. Remember that you're the expert, and readers don't have access to everything you know.

Think of yourself as a tour guide for our readers. Whether you're leading them through our marketing website, apps, or educational materials, communicate in a friendly and helpful way.

Speak truth. Understand MailChimp's place in our users' lives. Avoid dramatic storytelling and grandiose claims. Focus on our real strengths.

In order to achieve those goals, we make sure our content is:

Clear. Understand the topic you're writing about. Use simple words and sentences.

Useful. Before you start writing, ask yourself: What purpose does this serve? Who is going to read it? What do they need to know?

Friendly. Write like a human. Don't be afraid to break a few rules if it makes your writing more relatable. All of our content, from splashy homepage copy to system alerts, should be warm and human.

Appropriate. Write in a way that suits the situation. Just like you do in face-to-face conversations, adapt your tone depending on who you're writing to and what you're writing about.

MailChimp®

DEFINING YOUR EDITORIAL STYLE GUIDE

Approved Taglines

Next, keep the taglines you want used here. As your business grows, so will your content marketing or writing team. Don't assume everyone knows all of your company's taglines and brand-specific words. Write them down and explain when it's best to use them. Make a note of retired or seasonal taglines that should not be used anymore.

Brand Tone of Voice

This section is the big one, folks. This is where you personify your brand and create a voice that's loud and strong enough to be heard through the noise. This is where you expand upon your general brand messaging and define how you want to sound to the world.

Just as designers provide incorrect usages of a brand logo in a graphic standards guide, give examples of specific language you would and wouldn't use. Even providing a link to another website, with a tone of voice you like, is helpful.

Considerations include:

What kind of emotion do you want to illicit?

What's the best response for messaging when your consumers are experiencing negative emotions, such as finding an error page?

How can your culture translate into your voice?

Will you swear or use edgy language?

Is this a voice your buyer personas would like and respect?

Will this voice be different in different channels or different formats? How?

Advice From A Pro Writer On
Creating An Authentic Tone Of Voice

Steal

Find voices you love and steal the essence of what makes them great.

Break the Rules

There is absolutely no reason to just fall in line with what everyone else is doing. Be authentic.

Take Risks

Taking a risk with your tone of voice can lead to big rewards. You may turn someone off, but you'll also gain a loyal pack of followers.

Make Yourself Happy

The best writers write for themselves. If your content can make you laugh, smile or feel something, there's a great chance the world will feel those emotions too. Be your own gauge of impact.

Bonus Activity

Voice Discovery Brainstorm

A good exercise for writing this section is to imagine your brand as a person and think about how they would act or sound. Get everyone together and have fun scribbling down the thoughts of the group. Is your company fun or authoritative and smart? Cool and modern or humble and helpful? Think of your brand as a buyer persona. Go through all of those attributes to identify characteristics that will help you discover your tone of voice. They may not all be used for tone of voice creation, but they'll help you to discover what that voice should be.

- Age
- Education
- Mood
- Career
- Gender
- Family
- Likes
- Dislikes
- Sense of humor
- Interests
- Entertainment preferences
- Social groups and subcultures
- Characteristics and traits
- Favorite phrases or words

Pro Tip

The absolute best way to teach your brand messaging is to use your brand manual as an example. So, once the meat of your brand manual is written, go through it again and rework it to be in your brand tone of voice.

DEFINING YOUR EDITORIAL STYLE GUIDE

Copy Rules

General

Now that you've got your tone of voice laid out, use this section to make key points about the nitty-gritty details of writing your content. This can be as long and comprehensive as you need it to be. If you're a simple business with a simple blog and a *Facebook* page, just jot down some basics that come to mind.

Large businesses that are churning out content on all kinds of platforms will need to get very detailed. Considerations include:

PREFERRED POINT OF VIEW

First, second, or third person?

Active or passive voice?

How will you address genders? Are you writing for one gender (Playtex is) or will you use a singular "they"?

CAPITALIZATION

Can staff use caps to emphasize an IMPORTANT POINT? Or is that a no-no?

What should be title case and what will be sentence case?

ACRONYMS

In our modern, text-lovin', alphabet soup world, will your business use acronym slang like LOL, TFW, or JK?

PUNCTUATION

Will you use exclamation points or avoid them?

Use of contractions.

USABILITY & STYLE

Can writers underline or bold text?

Use keywords in your headlines.

Provide links when you're making a reference.

Will you use lists and will they use bullets? This makes scanning easy.

How do you want to phrase your calls to action?

Can writers use slang or cliches?

Do's and Dont's

This is exactly what it sounds like, a specific list of what to say or not say, if you need it. It's a great place to speak out against pet peeves.

Is it ever OK to abbreviate your business name? How should people refer to your customers? As clients, as family or as "the (insert-brand-name-here) nation"? Do certain words over-deliver on your brand promise? Or have you decided to never use certain words or modifiers to refer to your product? (Like saying "an iPhone smartphone".)

Terms and Usage Guidelines

Lots of industries have legal considerations for everything they say to the public. It's illegal to misrepresent yourself or overpromise. One use of this section is to clearly outline what cannot legally be said about your product or service.

Other helpful content here includes the use of industry-specific terms, language or words your company has chosen to never use and a quick-guide of definitions for company services or terms that need a bit of explaining. If your writers don't understand what they're saying, no one else will either.

If your company sells goods or services used by children, you'll have a lot to add here including COPPA, CARU and FTC compliance guidelines. Any other highly regulated industries will have also their own set of rules you'll need to add.

When your business works with the licensed properties of other companies, add all of those licensing rules here to save time and money on rewrites and content approval chains.

DEFINING YOUR EDITORIAL STYLE GUIDE

Grammatical Style Guide and Punctuation Rules

Most people haven't thought about the Chicago Manual of Style, Associated Press Stylebook (AP) or The MLA Handbook since college term papers. To be honest, there still isn't too much to think about, even for our purposes. Just pick one, make it accessible via a paid subscription or paper copy, and use it to look up: the usage of words, hyphens, new tech terms, which numbers gets spelled out, where commas go, capitalization of headlines, etc. You'll be a lot more grammatically consistent than anyone relying solely on Google.

There isn't a big name grammar guide for just websites, so everyone still relies on mainly these three for direction. If you're really into making trivial decisions, **here's a full listing of style guides** to choose from. A good general rule is to let your writers decide, if you don't personally have a preference.

Trademarks

It's better to be safe than sued!

Whether your company is large enough to need an in-house lawyer or not, it's a good idea to be proactive with legal trademarks and registered terms. Jot down the terms that need special treatment, superscript, or legal annotation, and when. For instance, some terms only require a ® or ™ on the first mention.

Pro Tip

AP does not typically use the Oxford comma/serial comma, Chicago Manual of Style does.
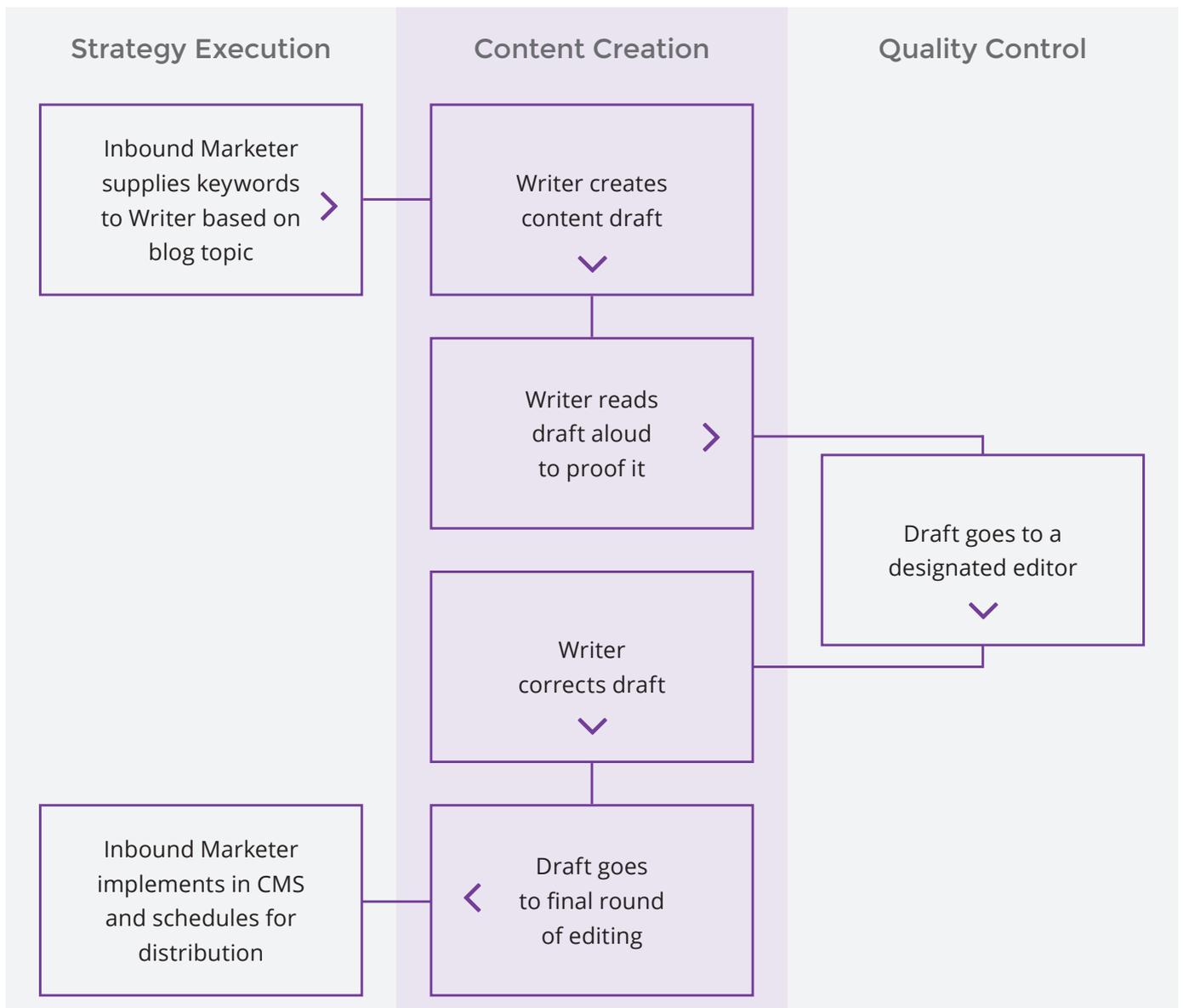
Pro Tip

Include keyboard shortcuts for legal symbols for MAC and PC.

DEFINING YOUR EDITORIAL STYLE GUIDE

Optional: Content Approval or Publishing Processes

If content is a big part of your marketing efforts (and it should be), you'll want to outline content creation and approval processes. It doesn't have to be complicated, just a guide to help newcomers (and remind your content vets) that there's a process for great content.

A Simple Process Example

Strategy Execution	Content Creation	Quality Control
Inbound Marketer supplies keywords to Writer based on blog topic >	Writer creates content draft ⌄	
	Writer reads draft aloud to proof it >	Draft goes to a designated editor ⌄
	Writer corrects draft ⌄	
Inbound Marketer implements in CMS and schedules for distribution	< Draft goes to final round of editing	

Create Your Graphic Standards

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CREATING YOUR
GRAPHIC STANDARDS

When people hear the term "brand guide", they often think it's the deck that talks about how pretty their logo is, or why the brand colors are the shades they are. Logo variants, color palettes and font choices are significant, but they only comprise one portion of a larger, comprehensive brand manual.

When separated on their own, the graphic elements that represent a brand can be found in a graphic standards guide or brand identity style guide.

Just like words and tone of voice, design plays an important role in ensuring your marketing materials and advertising efforts are "on brand." While the chances of others designing for your brand are slim compared to those speaking and writing for it, having graphic standards as part of your brand guide will help keep things looking relatively uniform.

The last thing you want is a great piece of content in the right tone of voice, to be typeset in Comic Sans (unless this is your brand's typeface, which, if it is, we should probably have a chat) and flanked by a pixelated version of your beloved logo.

> Even two-pages of do's and dont's for your logo goes a long way toward creating consistent visual representation for your brand.

The following suggested sections can get pretty detailed, depending on the size of your organization, so use good judgment when deciding what you need to include. Think about it like creating *IKEA* furniture assembly instructions for your brand visuals. Tell a concise story about the parts, define clear rules for putting them into practice and skip the Allen wrench.

CREATING YOUR GRAPHIC STANDARDS

Logo

Your logo is the simplest visual representation of the emotion, value and experience customers derive from your brand.

In this section of your graphic identity guidelines, identify the anatomy of your mark and what makes it unique. This is the biggest storytelling asset of your whole brand. How was your logo created and why? The **Heineken visual brand identity guide** offers the meaning and significance of everything from their red star to the emblem on the bottle labels.
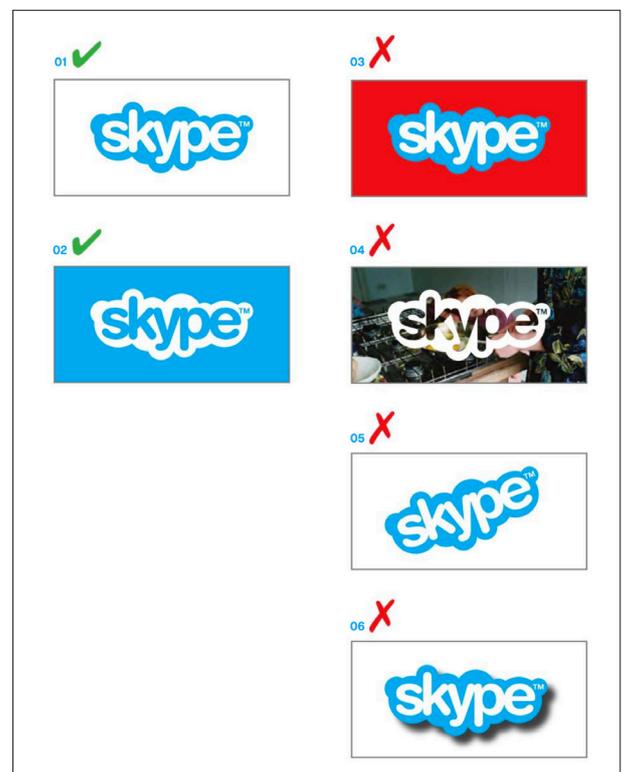
After you've created the logo of your dreams, it will be important to maintain the integrity of it across platforms. In addition to showing off your logo, provide the reader some rules to follow regarding placement and acceptable alterations.

Creating Consistency

Skype's brand guidelines do a great job of defining exactly how the logo can and cannot be used. From the wrong color to skewed proportions, *Skype* covers it all, just in case. When creating similar rules for your logo you'll want to include considerations for:

Various Do's and Dont's for using the Skype logo.

- Use of background colors

- Placement of the logo on images

- Adequate spacing around a logo

- Positioning near or next to other logos

- The addition of effects like dropshadows

Remember, your logo is the simplest thing you offer for people to identify your brand. Consistency is key.

Color Pallet

The emotions that people feel when they see your logo on shopping bags or billboards have a lot to do with its colors. Cool blues have the power to convey dependability, while bright yellows offer the viewer a sense of optimism.

Tell the reader what your colors signify and why they were chosen to represent your brand. And if there are any complimentary colors consistently used in marketing materials, list those as well. The *University of California* has created an entire sub-site to educate users on how best to represent their brand. **Included on it's own page** is an easy understand guide on just how critical color is to the *UC* brand.

Show Them

Present all of your brand colors as swatches laid out in a neat grid, much in the way paint chips are displayed at the hardware store.

The following technical information should be supplied as well, to provide consistency across all applications.

IN PRINT

PMS - Ensure colors match

CMYK - 4 Color process

ON SCREEN

RGB - Representing colors digitally

HEX - Preceded by '#', used on the web

Color swatches from the University of California's brand guidelines show primary and secondary color options.

CREATING YOUR
GRAPHIC STANDARDS

Fonts & Typography

Many people move through life unaffected by font. It takes a trained eye to notice the nuance of letter spacing or the contrast between thicks and thins in letterforms. If you've chosen a specific font family to represent your brand however, you'll want it to show up correctly everywhere, every time. Type is powerful. In keeping with the approach for your logo and color palette, continue the story with why you chose the typeface you did.

For some companies typography plays as important a role as the logo. This has been the case for Apple since the consumer electronics giant's inception. Apple thinks about typography every step of the way - from marketing to its product lines - so much so that there is even **a Wikipedia article about it**.

Show Them

A more detailed graphic standards guide will even dictate appropriate sizes for headlines and body copy. At the very least, present the reader with a type specimen featuring the alphabet - capitals and lowercase - or in dummy text. This will help the reader familiarize themselves with the detail and nuance of your brand's official font.
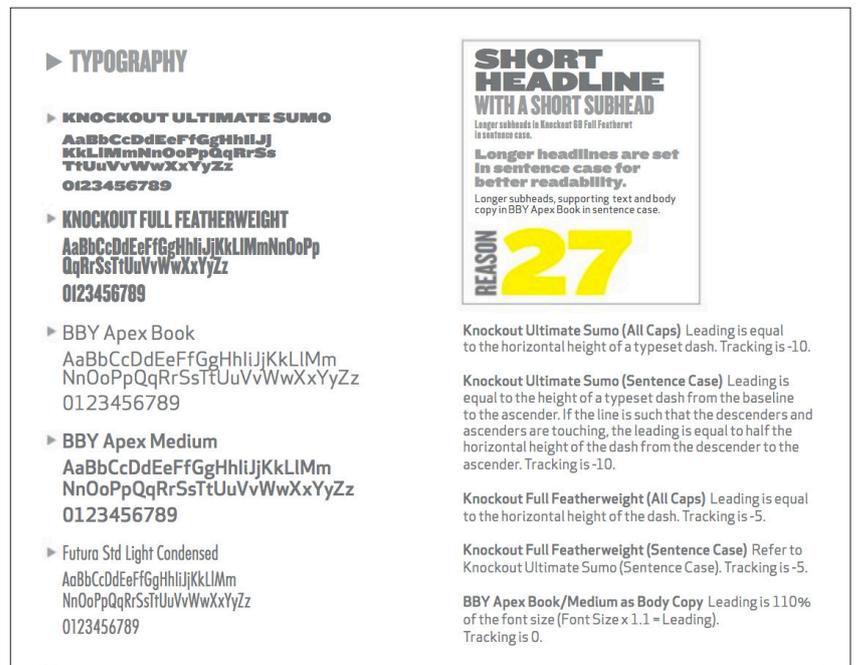
An excerpt from the Best Buy brand identity guidelines

CREATING YOUR
GRAPHIC STANDARDS

Photo and Image Guidelines

We stress over capturing just the right angle of our chins for our *Facebook* profile photos, so why not take the same care with the photography in our marketing materials? Photography is a reflection of your brand and can repel or attract customers in a fraction of a second. If photography is an important part of your brand, consider adding a section to define visual style and emotional tone. This will be helpful for freelance photographers who will often be tasked with executing a creative brief on behalf of your brand.

The majority of U.S. consumers instantly picture the color blue when they're asked to think about *Walmart*. The same amount of care that has been given to how color is used in *Walmart's* branding, has also been applied to their photography. Almost **a third of their brand guidelines** are dedicated to the subject, which makes sense for a company that exists to sell you stuff.

Additional Considerations

When dictating rules for photography, think about everywhere photos are used to represent your brand. Common applications include billboards, print ads, web banners, and social media graphics.

Round out your photography and image guidelines with specific dimensions and resolution requirements. This is especially important for the digital spaces your brand will occupy. And don't forget examples. Show the reader the images that best represent your brand.

Plan Your Brand Strategy & Execution Guidelines

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PLANNING YOUR BRAND STRATEGY & EXECUTION GUIDELINES

Make this simple and start by thinking about your mission and vision. Those principles will guide you into creating this section for outlining your marketing strategies, social media goals and best practices.

What you're doing here is getting into the nitty-gritty of defining your purpose and plan for every way you interact with customers. You'll also need best practices for each, so that you can make the most of all of your marketing efforts and create a consistent brand experience everywhere your business appears.

Strategic Goals

Do you want a bigger *Instagram* following than Kim Kardashian? Do you want to be the world's leading source of life hacks that use shower curtain rings because you sell shower curtain rings? Do you want to spread awareness about honeybees because supporting that cause is a fundamental value of your business? Are you a fun restaurant who simply wants to bring the party online?

Whatever your goals are, there's a way to accomplish them. Just be clear about where you want to go, so that you can figure out how to get there.

Objectives

What are the main objectives in your marketing? Sure, you want to sell something, but that's not a strategy. Go back to your Brand Identity section and really think about this. If you're already using the Inbound Marketing Methodology, you're ahead of the curve. Leverage what you know about, and what you care about to make people familiar with your brand, products and services.

PLANNING YOUR BRAND STRATEGY & EXECUTION GUIDELINES

These don't have to be as detailed as objectives in your marketing campaigns, but you should have real goals if you're ever going to understand the value of your marketing efforts.

Some realistic goals would be to establish followings on particular social media channels, increase traffic to your website or increase content offer downloads. **Learn about SMART goals to up the ante of your marketing game.**

Website, Blog and Social Media Best Practices

Welcome to the Wild West of business communications. Millions of companies are online everyday using a million different approaches to talk to potential customers. Pay attention to what other companies are saying and more importantly, how they're saying it. The businesses that win the Internet with their great content are usually using a best practices guide. This is an extension of your brand tone of voice.

Another helpful tactic to include here are tips or processes for dealing with negative feedback online. When your brand is hit with a bad review or worse, a gang of Internet trolls, will your staff be prepared to handle it with grace? If not, they may end up slinging insults or ignoring/deleting comments out of fear. Both of these are really bad form. The world takes notice when brands stand up to online bullies, so plan your strategy carefully. Your response may go viral. Think about designating a key staff member to handle all online negativity or including a practical guide of Do's and Don'ts.

Key Points For Best Practices

Treat your blog as your marketing hub. Create new content and distribute it out to the online channels that are used by your buyer personas. That could be email, social media, forums, online publications, and so on.

PLANNING YOUR BRAND STRATEGY & EXECUTION GUIDELINES

If you're on social, be social, don't sell. Be a resource to answer questions, entertain, educate and help solve people's problems.

Be consistent! This is a big one. If you want to develop a relationship with potential customers (which you should be doing), then be a consistent voice in their social feeds. You can do this by always sharing blog posts on Mondays, posting engagement posts on Tuesday and Wednesdays, branded videos on Thursday. Something of that nature. Make sure blogs go out consistently as well. If you post every Wednesday, people will begin to look for your content weekly.

Marketing Channel Strategy

Here's the lowdown and considerations for each of these popular marketing channels. While they're all very different, there's some strategies that can apply across the board:

Don't sell anything! That's what ads and your website are for. Use the principles of Inbound Marketing instead, and delight your audience with entertaining, educational and helpful content about the things you do and care about.

> Why buy ads for the whole cow when you can market the benefits of milk for free?

Make a point to note how frequently you want to post on each channel.

Republish old content. There's no reason not to reshare good stuff you've done in the past, especially if you have evergreen content.

Share other people's content, as long as it's valuable and relevant to your industry. And schedule content for the weekends, too. Engage with your fans. Answer their comments, like their posts. Let them know you are listening.

PLANNING YOUR BRAND STRATEGY & EXECUTION GUIDELINES

Facebook

Keep your audience in mind when crafting your *Facebook* posts. These posts can be longer than Twitter and similar length to *Linkedin*. Your headline needs to be catchy (not salesy) Because you're competing in the newsfeed with your followers' friends and family, you'll want to share genuine updates that grab their attention.

Outline which of your buyers are on *Facebook*, what format they prefer content in and what products, services or topics you want to use this channel for.

FACEBOOK
QUICK & DIRTY TIPS

Match your status tone and focus to your audience.

Ask a question or encourage discussion on your page to increase engagement.

Always feature an eye-catching image with your status updates.

Instagram

In order to be successful on this platform, you'll want to be as visually appealing as possible. In addition to that, with *Instagram's* algorithm update, the content you share should motivate your followers to want to engage with your posts. After all, engagement will contribute to where your post shows up in the news feed. Be sure to share photos and videos of high-quality, with engaging captions and don't forget hashtags. Hashtags are how people will find your posts if they're not already following you.

You'll want to think about: What hashtags are most relevant to you and your audience? Do you have preferred filters? Will you follow other people? Will you interact with them? How?

INTSAGRAM
QUICK & DIRTY TIPS

Use 10-15 relevant hashtags per post to increase engagement

Research your audience's behaviors via Instagram's built in analytics

Engage your followers. Like and comment on their content to start conversation.

Test filters and captions to see what your audience responds to the best.

PLANNING YOUR BRAND STRATEGY & EXECUTION GUIDELINES

Twitter

You have a 140 character limit on Twitter, so think of something enticing to get followers to click on your link. When sharing a link to your blog, find an actionable line from the post to draw in engagement. Go here to share links, quick thoughts, add to conversations and direct users to content on other channels. Like *Facebook*, Twitter users like interacting with brands for better or worse. Be prepared to handle public praise, criticism and questions. Also be prepared to be quick-on-the-draw with your replies. The Internet has never been patient.

When using Twitter, think about the brands, people and issues you're comfortable interacting with. It would be very helpful to have a "do's and don'ts" list for this channel as anything you say will be under a social microscope.

TWITTER QUICK & DIRTY TIPS

Keep your update under 140 characters.

Create your own clickable headline if possible.

Use a link shortener like bit.ly to truncate some of your copy.

Try to incorporate popular hashtags that relate to the update *and* your target audience.

Reply quickly.

Tread lightly around controversial issues.

PLANNING YOUR BRAND STRATEGY & EXECUTION GUIDELINES

LinkedIn

The audience for *Linkedin* is exclusively business oriented and time is a huge factor. Make your posts direct by highlighting something actionable. Long form business-oriented content does perform on this site, but make it snappy and really enticing. Value is key on this channel.

What are your goals for using *LinkedIn*? Make sure you have a strategy behind your activity. Are you looking to become an industry leader? Land new talent hires? Promote clients? Think about the solving business-related problems, showing off company culture, sharing recent blog posts that might help other business people, anything that fits your company goals.

Job seekers flock to *LinkedIn* and contract workers live there. Consider what you'll want prospective employees or other businesses to know about your brand.

**LINKEDIN
QUICK & DIRTY TIPS**

Highlight an actionable tip from the post.

Ask questions to encourage conversation.

Tailor the update to groups where you are sharing.

Keep it business-oriented. This isn't Facebook.

A robust account with a lot of connects garners a lot of respect here.

Website Blog

This is the world you rule and create yourself. The best things you can do to make people want to read it are to post frequently and teach or share knowledge about your industry or products. Give people a reason to read your blog. It has to have a purpose.

Sure, some business blogs are entertainment, not education. That's fine if it's in your tone of voice and the topics are relevant to your industry. *Dollar Shave Club*, for example, sells a mail-delivery razor service. Their demographic is mainly guys under 40. **Their wildly entertaining blog** educates about hygiene, grooming, style and health. They entertain with a hilarious, absurd tone of voice.

The best tip we can give you? DON'T HARD SELL! Compare products, talk about benefits, teach potential consumers something about your industry, give readers solutions to their problems. Become a thought leader in your industry by answering the industry questions that everyone is searching for online. The possibilities for content are endless, but if you're only selling, don't expect anyone to read it.

**BLOGGING
QUICK & DIRTY TIPS**

Create your blog posts around relevant topics that you want to rank for on search engines. Your topics should be hyper-targeted vs. generic if you want to beat big branded companies.

Create a monthly editorial calendar to help keep your blog topics aligned with your monthly promotions.

Share all of your blog topics on your social media channels for more blog views and engagement.

Use social channels such as Linkedin and Medium to reshare your best performing blogs to other outlets about 2 weeks after you've posted them.

PLANNING YOUR BRAND STRATEGY & EXECUTION GUIDELINES

Video Guidelines

Video is becoming more and more important. If you're not posting videos on *Facebook* or your website by now, you're probably a little behind. But don't worry, technology today has made it easy to shoot and edit great looking videos for your business.

Be authentic and don't worry about making a Hollywood-style video. Set your phone up on a tripod and talk about what you know. Talk about how you can solve problems.

Experience will breed better results, so keep shooting and keep experimenting.

TOOLS FOR RECORDING

iPhones

Computer webcams

iPhone tripods

Smartphones

TOOLS FOR EDITING

iMovie (free)

Final Cut Pro (paid)

Snapchat (free)

Adobe Premier (paid)

Adobe Spark Video or Adobe Clip (free)

**VIDEO
QUICK & DIRTY TIPS**

Aim for 30 seconds to 1.5 minutes for social media.

You can go longer, up to 5 or 6 minutes, for videos on your website, since they came there to watch it.

Choose a flattering light, natural lighting is always flattering whether it's from a window or outdoors.

Experiment with video file size to get the smallest possible size for uploading, while keeping a good quality.

Audio is very important! Avoid wind or use a wind filter outdoors.

Keep it simple and keep experimenting with locations, formats and lengths.

PLANNING YOUR BRAND STRATEGY & EXECUTION GUIDELINES

Optimization and SEO

SEO should be an important part of every branding strategy. You need to make sure your company shows up for the right people at the right time. And if those people are using a search engine, like Google or Bing, to search for products or services you provide, SEO will help you to show up.

For more in-depth information on SEO best practices, **check out our Modern SEO Tips Ebook.**

It's important to remember that there's two main buckets of SEO: on-site SEO and off-site SEO. Something often forgotten is that these two buckets are not equal.

> "About 75% of all SEO is off-site, while 25% is on-site." Where should you be spending your time?

OPTIMIZATION & SEO BEST PRACTICES

Do keyword research using tools like SEMrush.com or Google Adwords Keywords planner. This will give you an idea what what keywords are being searched the most so you can craft content around them.

Always be creating targeted consistent content.

Don't be afraid to network with other influential bloggers and ask them to share your content. Don't cold-call them though, form relationships.

Events

Ah, old fashioned in-person networking. These too are branded pretty heavily. Everything you've decided for your brand can be used here, with your team personifying your brand.

Special considerations include what team members should wear, how they should interact with people, the graphics on swag, etc. Depending on the event, this is an opportunity to create even more personality for your brand such as convention experiences, unveilings, music, lighting, entertainment and more. Every choice you make will tell the world something about who you are.

Social Media Crisis Management Plan

Having a company-wide plan in place will empower you to act quickly and effectively when a crisis begins. With a social media crisis management plan, your team will be empowered to take action and prevent the crisis from growing out of control.

What is a social media crisis?

Internet trolls, bad reviews, negative feedback. Any online situation that puts your business at risk for reputation-damaging impact.

To get started with your crisis plan, outline the exact steps everyone should take on social media during a crisis. This can range anywhere from your top executives to the most junior employees. Include a list of who should be contacted at each stage of a potential crisis, and provide guidelines for how all employees are expected to communicate on social media.

Your social media crisis management plan should include:

Guidelines for how to identify the type of crisis

Roles and responsibilities for each department

A communication plan for internal updates

Approval processes for messaging posted on social media

Pre-approved external messaging, images, or information

A copy of the company-wide social media policy

PLANNING YOUR BRAND STRATEGY & EXECUTION GUIDELINES

List Your Buyer Personas

Before you can sell anything, you have to know who needs it. That's where your buyer personas come in. Buyer personas are a cornerstone of your Inbound Marketing. These fictional representations of your customers will teach you who you're selling to and how to do it best. If you don't already have these, **hop over here and create them**.

List all of your buyer personas so they have a place in your ever-growing brand manual and can be quickly found or referenced.

Buyer Persona Targeting

If your business is already on the Inbound Marketing train (as it should be), here's an additional section to target your tone of voice and content types, specifically for those efforts. This is as simple as brainstorming the right approach and tone of voice for each buyer persona and jotting it down here.

Example Persona
Business Bob

Age

Gender

Marital Status

Location

Job Title

Level of Seniority

Length of Workday

Activities

Pain Points

Goals

Main Information Sources

Common Objections To Your Product or Service

What Kind of Language He Uses

Buyer Persona Targeting

So how do you find the perfect tone of voice to target your buyer personas? What can you do to make sure your messaging is attractive to your target audience? The first step to creating your buyer personas' tones of voice is to understand your audience. You'll want to take some time researching your customers inside and out to decide which voice they are most receptive to.

PLANNING YOUR BRAND STRATEGY & EXECUTION GUIDELINES

To get a good understanding of your audience start with the 5 W's:

Who: This is where your buyer persona begins and ends. Who is your audience? Who are the people who will be looking to buy your product or services? Consider their gender, their age and their ambitions.

What: What kind of vibe do they like? What kind of language do they speak. What are their likes and dislikes?

When: When are they experiencing a pain point? When are they researching about your product? Does your ideal buyer decide to purchase on impulse? Or does he or she exhaustively research options before making a purchase?

Where: Where is your audience hanging out? What social channels are they on? Where does your buyer personas shop? Online or offline?

Why: The "why" is all about psychographics. Why do they need your product?

Now let's work on describing your brand the way you want each buyer persona to view it, using only three words. For a buyer persona called "Mary-The-Mom", let's use these 3 traits: passionate, eccentric, and genuine

Now let's define these traits a little further. How would these characteristics show up in audience communication? How can they come across in the kind of content you're creating? Let's continue with this example:

Passionate – enthusiastic, heartfelt, action-oriented, expressive, emotional

Eccentric – out-of-the-box, funky, remarkable

Authentic – genuine, trusting, direct, honest, credible

Lastly, let's add some style tips. Style tips will help content writers write in the language you want to portray.

We want our messages to Mary to be heartfelt and emotional. Avoid being boring and uninterested.

Our brand is eccentric and Mary likes that, so we want to stand out with funky and remarkable content. Don't talk about what everyone else is talking about, be different.

We are authentic and trusting, Mary has a family to protect after all, therefore use positive language.

Content Types For Buyer's Journey Stages

Not everyone writing your content will be as knowledgeable about your buyer journey stages, or Inbound Marketing funnel, as your Inbound Marketers.

Think about the points they'll need to know to hit the right tone of voice for each buyer. Make a short, bulleted list for each.

AWARENESS

CONSIDERATION

DECISION

Educational, blogs that highlight product related pain points, nothing about specific products, problem-solving

Case study blogs, White papers, Product comparisons

Promotional offers, Free shipping, Direct asks, Sales Guidelines

PLANNING YOUR BRAND STRATEGY & EXECUTION GUIDELINES

Sales and Customer Service Scripts and Guidelines

If you're rocking a robust sales and marketing team, tap into that brainpower to write down the most effective scripts, lines and email tactics they have. Get everyone together to share their best strategies, then capture them here. If you don't pay attention, you're likely to lose your best strategies with time and employee turnover.

Add your scripts, tips and secrets of the pros. Include advice for each stage of the buyer's journey. Talk about troubleshooting customer service situations. Teach your team how to handle themselves "on brand", as well as how to sneak branded messages into everyday interactions, adding to your complete brand experience.

Chewy.com is a great example of branding your customer service. When you call this pet product delivery service to inquire about when your order will arrive, they'll tell you what day to "expect it scratching at your door." It's cute, it's memorable, and it turns an otherwise forgettable interaction into a surprisingly fun experience with their brand.

Wow, You've Built Your Brand Guide.

First of all, congratulations. Even if you only have a two-page document of selected sections, you've done a huge service to your brand and your content. It's the start of consistency, planning and collaboration that will take your marketing efforts to the next level, wherever that may be.

Review your website and social media channels. You're ready to start implementing your tone of voice, graphic standards, strategies and editorial style guide rules into everything you do. Questions will have a place to be answered, new team members will cling to it and most importantly, your customers will start taking your content more seriously, or even, start noticing it.

Finally, share this with every member of your staff. They'll be even more invested in using it if they were involved in creating it. Keep your brand manual online in a format you can edit. Google Docs or an internal server is preferred. You can easily give edit access to those you trust and view-only access to your whole staff, as well as contractors and freelancers. This should be a living document that gets added to all of the time. Empower your staff to update it and use it as a reference for all of their brand communications.

Get out there and show off your brand. It's polished and ready to meet the world.

Need Some Help?

Brand manuals, even simple ones, are such an important part of guiding your content that we won't begin a project without collaborating to create one. Our team is made up of experts in helping businesses understand their brand and market themselves more effectively.

Let our team start helping you to create your brand manual today. Our marketing and branding specialists are ready.

Get a Branding Consultation
or Learn More about our
Branding Workshop & Services

IMPULSE
CREATIVE

CONTRIBUTORS

Danielle Rhodes

Content Marketer,
IMPULSE CREATIVE

Before she was adopted by Impulse Creative, Danielle was an award-winning journalist, copywriter for big brands across the globe and a creative superhero to agencies and small businesses across the country.

Katelyn Rhoades

Inbound Marketer,
IMPULSE CREATIVE

Katelyn Rhoades is an Inbound Marketer for Impulse Creative. A graduate of the University of Florida, Katelyn's professional expertise lies in content creation, social media marketing, and pay-per-click advertising.

Ryan VanDenabeele

Inbound Marketer,
IMPULSE CREATIVE

Ryan joined Impulse Creative as an Inbound Marketer to provide creative content which drives targeted and qualified leads to our client's businesses. Ryan is an entrepreneurial-minded storyteller driven to maximize the effectiveness of a message

Jeffrey Lewis

Graphic Designer,
IMPULSE CREATIVE

Before joining Impulse Creative, Jeffrey contributed five years in the higher education space as an in house visual designer and social media manager.