

THE BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO BRANDING

WELCOME TO THE BRANDING CONVERSATION

If you've ever wondered about branding then you wouldn't be alone. We live in a time where marketers, PR people and everyone outside and in between hurls the buzz term "branding" around like everyone should instantly understand it without any questions.

You may be entering this conversation with the basic understanding that a brand is a logo or slogan, but here at Top Hat IMC we believe that branding is so much more. So often businesses and individuals alike get caught up in trying to perfect the name of their business or logo while neglecting several other elements.

In this guide, I'd like to personally introduce you to our philosophy on branding. Very simply it's this: branding is a puzzle composed of six mutually dependant elements: narrative, font selection, color scheme, logo, style rules and a corporate identity package. In a puzzle, the picture isn't complete unless all of the pieces are properly placed. Branding is no different. If you're missing one piece, the picture isn't complete. You need all six to even consider your brand whole.

In the following pages, we'll take a bird's eye view of the puzzle and then continue by exploring each piece.

So without further ado, let's jump into the branding puzzle,



Ben Butler
FOUNDER & PRESIDENT, Top Hat IMC

NARRATIVE

**FONT
SELECTION**

**COLOR
SCHEME**

LOGO

**STYLE
RULES**

**CORPORATE
IDENTITY
PACKAGE**



1

NARRATIVE

Narrative is the first, foremost and most important piece of this puzzle. It is the corner piece that guides the rest of the process.

Like you would imagine, your brand's narrative is your story. It's, however, specifically more than that--it's an expertly copy written presentation of who you are in a way that is as easily understood by the world around you as it is your target audiences. This narrative should include an engaging description of your brand, what it does, why it does what it does, how it does it and the results of what's been done. It's also appropriate to cultivate a slogan here. All in all, this round of writing should be able to have an influential presence in every form of communication outputted by your brand.

It's vital to establish this before moving forward. Your narrative will not only directly shape the copy of the other puzzle pieces (where it applies), but this story has stake in deciding every visual element you will create to complete your brand.

2

FONT SELECTION

Font selection is perhaps the most underrated piece of the branding puzzle. Even upon reading this, you're muttering to yourself, "Why the heck would font selection make a difference?"

Fonts are a little detail that make a huge difference. It's so easy to spot the brands that don't have a selection to begin with. Every design element they put their hands to are riddled with 15 different font families. Business cards are in Oswald and Helvetica while websites are in Roboto and Source Sans Pro, while billboards across town are in Myriad Pro and *Zapfino*.

See a problem? It doesn't give an impression of thought, decision and a solid identity. Smaller brands -- that don't have the convenient notoriety of colossal companies like Coke and FedEx -- suffer from something that will kill the momentum of any brand's growth: a lack of fundamental consistency. We recommend businesses pick two primary fonts to use for platforms and stick with them.



3

COLOR SCHEME

Color scheme is another incredibly important corner piece of the branding puzzle. Although it's kept in mind more times than font selection, you'd be still surprised how many brand's neglect to formalize a color scheme.

This is especially dangerous when organizations or individuals jump into the production of business cards one month then print posters the next, followed by a website and concluded by (insert element here). We've all seen it -- the brand that is using more colors than you ever imagined possible. Although it's OK to use a splash of uncharacteristic color here and there to prove a point, your brand should primarily stick to a set scheme.

We recommend developing a swatch with 3-5 colors that best represents your narrative. Are you a story of power and success? Red may be appropriate to bring into the swatch. Are you regal with a long history? Purple may work. If you don't have the eye for creating a scheme, hire a designer.

One of the more familiar elements of the branding puzzle is the logo. Notice how it entered the discussion at number four rather than number one? A logo should be inspired or properly refined after a narrative, font selection and color scheme have been decided.

Although a logo doesn't have to exactly match your font selection or color scheme, it should very intentionally accomplish one of two things: compliment or contrast. It shouldn't be random -- by either complimenting your fonts or contrasting, you'll be sticking to strong design principle. Back to the point of the narrative, your logo should reflect your story. It can do so with typography or strong visuals. Either way, make sure it stands out from the competition.

You'll also want to have 2-4 set versions for various uses such as logo alone, logo with slogan and those elements in black and white.

A large puzzle piece graphic that is black and contains the word "LOGO" in white, bold, sans-serif capital letters. To the left of the word, inside the same piece, is a white circle containing the number "4". The puzzle piece is set against a light gray background that features faint outlines of other puzzle pieces, suggesting a larger puzzle. The overall theme is branding and design.

LOGO

4

We've reached a critical point.

You've spent countless hours thinking through and developing the narrative, font selection, color scheme and logo. Unfortunately, even if you're an organization of 3 or less, that work putting into creating a strong brand will be lost somewhere along the way.

The solution? A formalized document with style rules.

This guide will have the main copy of the narrative, the font selection names (and where to download them if necessary), color scheme with swatches and hex codes and logo variations with designated uses across mediums. It should also include a list of key terms your organization uses, how they're spelled and what's capitalized and when.

5

STYLE RULES

Rather than website, business cards, letterheads, print materials, email signatures, email templates and other elements first, we reserve them for last in our process and in the branding puzzle. With all of the ground work that's been cultivated, the much-anticipated corporate identity package can be tackled.

We have our narrative -- to use for all forms of corporate identity package copy -- and our font selection, color scheme, logo and style rules -- for all mediums of design. When you follow the first 5 steps, you will see your corporate identity packages just about bring themselves to life. All of the inspiration you need is now before you to knock the most audience-centric and style-integrated elements out of the park.

With this in place, the branding puzzle is nearly complete. It's finally important to insert your most used corporate identity pieces into your formalized style rules document. Don't forget links to where the templates can be found.



GET SOME HELP WITH THE PUZZLE

The branding puzzle takes time, brainstorming, thought and a variety of specific skills to perfect and put together.

Our “Branding Puzzle” philosophy comes from partnering with organizations -- across industries and continents -- to successfully build strong brands that stand out from the competition. With our experience and our diverse team of copywriters, designers and critical thinkers, we can help you assemble the puzzle from scratch or fill in the pieces you’re missing.

If you’d like to discuss how we can help, or what a partnership looks like with us, please feel free to reach out to me directly. If you’re local, we can set up a face-to-face meeting. If you’re from outside the general Pittsburgh area, we can set up a phone call or a video call.

I look forward to hearing from you!

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