Brand Identity Guidelines

PUTTING

Your organization's

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Why Do You Need Brand Identity Guidelines?

So your organization has just finished developing a new brand identity. You've spent many months working with your marketing department and/or agency building a new brand from the ground up while getting buy-in and approval from one stakeholder group after another. Now, after all the time and effort you've invested, you're ready to hit the ground running and apply your new branding to any and every marketing piece you can think of. Congratulations! But…you're not quite done yet.

There's one more—and it's a critically important—step left. And that's making sure that your new branding has the support and structure it needs to be sustainable and executable for years to come by the people in your organization and any of your marketing partners. In other words, it's time to establish your brand identity guidelines.

So what are these guidelines?

Brand identity guidelines help tell a compelling story, both verbally and visually, about the brand experience of an organization, company, product, or even a person. It provides a shared set of guiding principles and tools that are used to engage both internal and external audiences. It's, in essence, a playbook that lays out how your branding assets should be used to effectively convey your messaging.

Most immediately, it's a practical tool for your communications and marketing department to manage the creation of new digital and print materials to engage various audiences within your brand's landscape. It's also useful to anyone who communicates on your brand's behalf in writing, on the phone, or in person. Leaders across all of your organization's divisions and offices can use brand identity guidelines to help focus the way they think and talk about the company or organization. Writers can draw inspiration for new stories and materials, while others will find helpful resources in the typography, color palette, photography, and design element guidelines to create one-sheets, templates, flyers, and other day-to-day materials.

Furthermore, these guidelines can help the outside organizations and/or vendors with whom you work frequently to better understand how to consistently create materials that capture your brand's unique look and feel.

Main Goals for Brand Identity Guidelines

1

*To clarify and amplify a company or organization's distinctive **brand identity** as a standout presence in the competitive landscape.*

2

*To lift up and express a company or organization's **enduring qualities, core values, and advantages**.*

3

*To ensure consistent representation of the company or organization through **core messages and themes, visual identity, and tonal qualities**.*

Components for Developing Brand Identity Guidelines

Brand Purpose

A brand is the sum total of all associations that are made with an organization, a company, or a product. It's a collection of perceptions, reactions, and emotions that exists in people's minds. While a logo is a representation of the brand, it is not in itself *the* brand. An intentional brand strategy is designed to advance the ongoing recognition and legacy of an organization, a company, or a product. So it's of paramount importance that the overarching brand conveys its "DNA" through all of its touch points.

The following are key elements of your brand's foundation and need to be included in your brand identity guidelines. They represent the values, differentiating qualities, characteristics, marketplace positioning, and other important areas of your brand.

Brand Platform

Your brand platform provides the conceptual foundation that guides the way your brand is shaped to influence how your most important audiences understand your organization. It expresses what we want people to feel when they experience your organization or product/service, and what we hope they remember when they walk away.

While the brand platform is comprehensive and multi-faceted, not every idea expressed in it can or should be included in every communication piece. Rather, it provides depth of meaning and inspiration from which we can select the most compelling

A BRAND PLATFORM SHOULD BE:

- **Differentiated**—so that what sets your brand apart from other competitive brands is clear

- **Motivational**—so that it connects with people on an emotional level and inspires a desire to be associated with your brand

- **Authentic**—so that it is truly relevant to the experiences of your audiences and representative of all that is best about your brand

- **Strategic**—so that it aligns with your organizational goals

- **Comprehensive**—so that your overarching identity is clear, compelling, and unified

When every message and visual communications comes from the same conceptual core and connects to its intended audience in relevant ways, it creates an overall brand in which the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

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elements for specific audiences and purposes. It includes not only official messaging points but also everything we do as we engage with others on a daily basis. When every message and visual communications comes from the same conceptual core and connects to its intended audience in relevant ways, it creates an overall brand in which the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

Positioning Statement

Positioning is the intentional shaping of a brand to influence how your most important audiences understand it. It is the conceptual core message that will connect to your intended audiences in the most relevant ways.

The positioning statement is the expression of how an organization, a company, or a product wants to be perceived. It should answer the following three essential questions:

1 *What does your brand do best? What is the most important point of differentiation between your brand and competitive brands?*

2 *Who does your brand serve? How do we describe the people in your marketplace who will find your brand appealing?*

3 *Why is your brand unique? What are the essential reasons your brand is the best choice for these people?*

These words and the aspirations they embrace capture the essential attributes—the voice—of your brand. They form the foundation upon which to tell many stories and to support the overall brand narrative.

This creative signature or tagline is an emotional translation of the positioning—condensing all of its important points into a memorable phrase.

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Brand Signature

A brand signature puts forth a direct and persuasive reason to consider an organization, a company, or a product. It is more than a boast about being superior to other competitor brands. It is instead an essential idea that succinctly reminds everyone of the higher purpose of your brand. This creative signature or tagline is an emotional translation of the positioning—condensing all of its important points into a memorable phrase. This is not a headline, but a starting point to inspire the look, feel, and tone of communications.

This signature can be featured on all brand materials, including the website, social media channels, print advertising and marketing collateral, publications, internal communications, and business stationery. It can also be used as a central messaging line that spawns closely related messages in specific applications (e.g., website page headings, targeted brochures, blog names, etc.).

One Voice Messaging Platform

A messaging platform maps out messaging elements that support the positioning and signature. It identifies key words and phrases that concisely convey your brand values, character, differentiators, and benefits.

This messaging platform is designed to help provide greater consistency and clarity to your organization's collective branding, marketing, and communications effort. It presents a unified approach to how you speak to prospects and customers, internal audiences, and other constituents in your world.

Visual Identity Elements

This next section addresses the unique visual assets that give your brand expression distinctive and ownable qualities that bring to life your messaging architecture and brand platform. These visual elements, combined with the voice elements, provide all the creative tools to build the look, feel, and tone of communications and marketing materials. Maintaining a distinct and consistent look, feel, and tone ensures your brand personality shines through all communications.

Logo: This is the cornerstone of your visual identity. The logo represents your organization or company at the very highest level and is often the first point of engagement that your audiences have with your brand. It acts as a signature, an identifier, and a stamp of quality. It is, and should always be, the most consistent component in your communications.

In order to maintain this consistency, the brand identity guidelines should establish clear rules for:

- **Preferred version usage**—how the logo was designed to be used the vast majority of the time
- **Alternate version(s) usage**—these are other acceptable versions of the logo to be used in situations where the preferred version cannot be used—examples of this might be when one color is only available, or there is a severe horizontal or vertical space available
- **Secondary usage**—at times the background may compromise legibility of the logo—in this case, an all-white, reversed logo may be used

OTHER GUIDELINES IN THIS SECTION WOULD PROVIDE RULES AND EXAMPLES FOR:

- **Logo configurations**—the primary logo may need to be configured with the tagline or combined with sub-brands, product names, or departments; as a result guidelines need to be created to accommodate these situations
- **Size**—to maintain full legibility, a minimum size should be established for reproducing the logo
- **Clear space**—to ensure legibility and prominence, the guidelines need to establish a certain amount of clear space to be maintained around the logo for photos, text, and graphic elements
- **Improper usage**—it is recommended that you show unacceptable uses of the logo to prevent common mistakes

Color Palette: Color enhances the power and memorability of a brand identity. Beyond the logo, color is the most recognizable aspect of a brand identity, and using color appropriately can ensure your branded materials convey a cohesive image and visual story. To ensure color in your brand identity is consistently bold, yet simple, an intentional, refined, and rich color system needs to be established. Secondary and tertiary color palettes should also be established as an integral part of the brand's color system.

Typography System: Typography is a powerful brand tool that can add visual meaning to words and using selected typefaces is an important element in achieving overall brand consistency. When used regularly over time in your materials, the typefaces will become associated with your brand and recognized as an integral element of your visual identity. We recommend at least three font families that contain a variety of styles: bold face, light face, italic, etc., with designations for usage in headlines, body copy, captions, and other applications. Typefaces should be chosen for their distinct personalities (aligned with the brand), legibility, openness, and flexibility.

Imagery Guidelines: Photography typically will provide most of a brand's main visuals at all levels of communications. Developing a photography style can be a key tool for depicting the brand personality and capturing the essence of how a brand can connect with people in ways that words cannot.

There are other graphic elements that can play an integral part of your visual brand identity. These can include expressive typography, infographics, and background patterns.

AaBbCc

AaBbCc

AaBbCc

Regardless of what form of communications—digital or print—is being using, your core brand personality should be evident and shine through consistently.

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Visual Narrative

Putting It All Together: This section of the branding guidelines illustrates how all the visual elements come together to form a unique and cohesive look and feel. Regardless of what form of communications—digital or print—is being using, your core brand personality should be evident and shine through consistently.

Branded Materials

This section presents specific examples of branded materials that align with a strong set of branding guidelines.

Addendum

Oftentimes, it is necessary to provide guidelines for aspects such as:

- Writing style
- Communication policies
- Production specifications

Ensuring Your Brand is Built for the Long Haul

Taken together, the elements for building brand identity guidelines provide the roadmap necessary to ensure a strong and integrated brand platform. The Design Channel understands how to create and build these core identity elements and how to create marketing and communication materials that fully express a brand to your intended audiences. From your brand positioning strategy and overall messaging to your typography, graphics, and photography approach, we can create a brand platform that engages your audiences with more relevance, distinction, boldness, and power than ever before.

While we believe it's important to create identity guidelines, we also build flexibility into your brand ecosystem so that we can address your specific business and marketing needs. Our brand identity guidelines system not only establishes parameters for you but also helps provide the basis for additional inspiration. It is designed to help put in place all the possibilities for your newly energized brand.

Examples

Germantown Academy

Arlington Convention and Visitors Service

Children's National Medical Center

Wright Manufacturing

Johns Hopkins Bloomsburg School of Public Health

Germantown Academy

Germantown Academy (GA) is an independent school located outside Philadelphia, PA and is recognized as the oldest non-sectarian independent Pre-K to 12th grade school in the U.S. TDC embarked on a multi-pronged rebranding assignment to 1) assess the branding efforts of competitors; 2) evaluate GA's current communication materials and 3) gain a better understanding of perceptions about the school from the GA community through extensive interviews and focus groups.

Our findings helped us create a new positioning statement, tagline, message platform, refined logo, and brand identity look and feel for GA. These assets were incorporated into brand identity guidelines to tell a compelling story, both verbally and visually, about the brand experience of GA, and to be sustainable for years to come.

Arlington Convention and Visitors Service

Arlington County, VA is a world-class urban county located outside Washington, DC. Arlington Convention and Visitors Service (ACVS) is specifically involved in attracting regional, domestic, and international tourism and business meetings for the county. TDC was awarded a multi-year contract to develop a new brand identity for ACVS as well as marketing communications, collateral, and interactive media to support its mission.

We researched the competitive landscape in the region, including as Washington, D.C.; Baltimore, MD; and the state of Virginia. We also researched other "edge cities" across the US and other like-minded destinations. Furthermore, we conducted interviews with key stakeholders and reviewed available "tourism" research. The resulting insights that informed our brand positioning, which highlighted Arlington County's attractions as well as its proximity in location and spirit to the nation's capital. This served as the launching point for a new logo and tagline: "National History. Local Flavor." To date we've created branding assets for ACVS's website, print advertising, visitors guide covers, direct mail, collateral, emails, and exhibits. The brand platform was incorporated into a brand style guide to steward ACVS's distinctive qualities, core values, and visual assets for years to come.

Children's National Medical Center

Children's National Medical Center (CNMC) is the preeminent pediatric provider in the Washington, DC region and is recognized as a pediatric healthcare leader around the world. TDC partnered with CNMC to create a modern, engaging brand identity system to provide greater consistency and appeal to its materials, and to reinforce its strength as an international brand.

The branding we created was inspired by artwork done by children at the hospital. The new branding was employed initially in a high-end fundraising brochure that was presented by the center's Sheikh Zayed Institute for Pediatric Surgical Innovation at the World Health Care Congress in Abu Dhabi, where it was highly praised. We further applied the new brand identity to fact sheets, publication templates, presentation tools, and various marketing and collateral pieces. These assets were documented in a brand style guide to ensure consistent representation of CNMC through core messages and themes, visual identity, and tonal qualities.

Wright Manufacturing

Wright Manufacturing is a pioneer in the lawn maintenance industry, with innovative commercial mowers that feature stand-on design technology. TDC worked with Wright Manufacturing when the first stand-on mowers were introduced to the market. Our job was to tell Wright's story to build brand awareness at a national level, to drive new prospects to choose the Wright brand, and to build sales at local dealerships.

We conducted a deep-dive discovery process to understand the brand attributes, marketplace dynamics, and end-user preferences. This included interviews with Wright leadership, interviews with distributors and dealerships, interviews with commercial landscapers, competitive brand benchmarking research, test driving the equipment, and tours of the manufacturing plant. What emerged was a brand promise that Wright was the first and most advanced stand-on mowing technology available to landscape professionals. From that we created a messaging architecture, theme/tagline, color palette, typography system, brand look and feel, and applied these assets to print, direct mail, point of sale, collateral materials, website, and more to boost market visibility and sales. We incorporated all of these assets into in-depth brand standards guide.
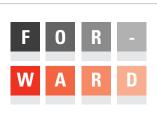
Johns Hopkins Bloomsburg School of Public Health

The Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health is the largest, oldest, and most academically acclaimed school of public health in the world. Its reach extends globally through nine academic disciplines and over 45 centers and institutes. It sought a communications partner to manage an end-to-end re-branding program that would help develop a clear, coherent brand strategy for the school, lead to a better understanding of its mission, and meaningfully differentiate it from the competition.

Starting with research, we conducted in-depth interviews with faculty, staff, donors, alumni, and board members. We implemented a competitive brand benchmarking study to understand how other public health institutions and like-minded organizations position and brand themselves. We also iperformed a communications audit of over 100 pieces of the school's existing marketing and communications materials. This led to the development of a strategic positioning platform for the school, which was focus group-tested and became the core message delivered in every medium. Once the positioning was established, we created a new logo, tagline, and a comprehensive set of brand guidelines and templates to ensure consistency with the new brand.

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A branding and integrated marketing communications expert

The Design Channel has extensive experience in creating powerful positioning, branding platforms, and content marketing programs for organizations and enterprises in a wide range of industries. Visit www.thedesignchannel.com to learn more about our work, services, and team.

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