

How to Conduct a Brand Audit

And why every
business should do it.

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AND WHY EVERY BUSINESS SHOULD DO IT.

**Ready for some wicked honest reflection?
It's time for a brand audit.**

Back up. What Exactly is a Brand?

Good question. You're probably asking because you've read, heard, or seen a lot of different answers. Some think a company's brand is its logo and visuals. For others, it's a tagline or corporate slogan. Still others espouse company values, mission, and vision. In fact, it's all that and much, much more.

Your brand resides within the hearts and minds of your customers, clients, and prospects. It is the sum total of their experiences and perceptions.

Sounds heady, right? Basically, your brand is how people feel about you and how you make them feel. And that takes more than a logo. Shaping positive impressions and experiences in the minds of your customers takes thoughtful strategy and a keen understanding of who your customers are and how you make their lives better.

So, sure, in part your brand is the intentional visual elements that you associate with your business—logo, color palette, fonts, well-designed marketing materials—and it's also your messaging—core messages, values, tagline—but most importantly, it's the strategy that lies behind the visual and the verbal that will guarantee you have the desired effect on your customers and prospects.

That strategy informs effective positioning; that strategy informs the verbal and the visual; that strategy is completely aligned with your ultimate business objectives, and, will therefore help you to increase market share and drive more profit. Brand is about opportunity for your business.

And in order to capitalize on that opportunity, you need to start with a brand audit.

So, What's a Brand Audit?

Through a brand audit, you take a step back, ask yourself tough questions, find answers to those questions, and honestly assess your brand's place and position in the market. You ask yourself the deeper questions, too, about who your company is and what you want it to be.

It's critical for established brands to take a step back every now and then and assess how things are going. Maybe new competitors have entered the market and you want to make sure your business is measuring up. Maybe you want to make sure your day-to-day operations and beliefs are in line with who you truly are—because companies evolve. Perhaps you want to assess if it is time for a rebrand or to just get a general overview of how your company is performing or is positioned in the market.

BRAND AUDIT STEP 1: **Assess What You've Got and What You're Putting Out There**

Is your brand consistent both visually and verbally?

A highly competitive, over saturated, and super savvy marketplace demands consistency. If you want your brand to be recognized, understood, and ultimately loved, you cannot throw mixed messages or varied visuals into the market and expect people to get you. Today, human beings are served up thousands of messages a day and make intentional choices about which brands to "let in" and which to push out of their consciousness so as not to get overwhelmed. Now, if with each hit from your brand there's a different message or varying visual, there's no way that consumer is ever going to register you.

Try this exercise:

Pull out your organization's stationery, business cards, marketing collateral, and any other printed materials such as brochures, rack cards, posters, flyers, etc. Lay them all out on a conference room table.

Then, pull up your website and all your social channels on a screen (or screens). Take pictures of your exterior signage, vehicle signage, etc. and put those on the table too.

Now take a look at all of it together. Is there a consistent look to all the materials?

- Are the colors the same?
- Are the fonts the same?
- Does everything use the correct logo?
- Are you describing your organization the same way in your brochure as you are on your website?
- If you have a tagline, is it consistent throughout?
- Is the photography or imagery style professional and consistent?
- Is everything professionally printed and of the same quality?

So, be honest with yourself and try to objectively assess what you're putting into the marketplace. Do your print materials jibe with your website? Is your signage in synergy with your advertising and does all of it represent who you really are and what your strategic business goals are?

If, through this exercise, you notice inconsistencies, then we highly recommend you invest the time to bring all of your brand assets in line and clarify your purpose and position in the market. This takes time, and you may need to dig deep, but in the end your brand will emerge stronger, better, and more irresistible.

Hey, maybe the inconsistencies are an easy fix. If you have a brand strategy, and therefore a good handle on your brand messaging and visuals, then maybe it's just a matter of making sure everyone in your company knows what the brand standards are. Sometimes different people in different departments can dilute a brand by imposing their personal preferences. Don't be afraid to be the brand police.

BUT, maybe the inconsistencies exist because you don't have a good handle on what your brand promise is to your customer and how you tell your brand story effectively—both with words and with colors and imagery. If that's the case, then your brand audit is going to take a little more time...

Strong brands are ones who deliver consistent messages—visual and verbal.

As a branding agency, we typically undertake an in-depth brand audit with any new client. This process usually involves focus groups, surveys,

and market research in conjunction with the assessment of tangible and digital assets. But if you're not ready to work with an agency, no sweat. If you can answer the following questions in the next step then you're already on your way to building a stronger brand.

PRO TIP

It takes the average consumer 7 interactions with your brand before they pay attention and hear your message. If your branding is inconsistent, it's going to take longer to get their attention.

BRAND AUDIT STEP 2: Reflection & Discovery

**Who are you? What sets you apart?
Who is your audience? What do they want?**

Try answering the following questions. It may take some time and some careful thought, but if you can answer these questions, then your brand's in good shape and you're headed in the right direction. If you answer "no" or "I don't know" to any of these questions, you could benefit from a deeper dive and should read on to learn what that entails.

- What are your company's mission, vision, and values?
- What are your brand's strengths and weaknesses?
- What benefits do you provide to your customer/client?
- Who is your competition and what makes you different/better?
- What perceptions exist about your brand in the marketplace?

- Who is your target market and where can you find them? Age, gender, geographic location, interests, hobbies, etc.
- What is your brand's true, authentic story? Are you telling that story well and consistently?

If you define your target market as “anyone under 40” or something equally generic, you haven’t defined your target market well enough to move your brand forward.

- Do you have standard messaging that you can pull from when writing about your company? A brand positioning statement, an elevator pitch, company descriptors, and professional bios for your leadership?
- Do you have a professionally-designed logo and all the necessary high-resolution files you need to display your logo in a variety of different media (eps, jpg, png, pdf, etc.)?
- Do you have professional photography to use on your website and marketing materials?
- Does your organization have a Brand Style Guide that outlines your visual and verbal brand rules?

PRO TIP

Your logo should never appear with a white box around it. If it does, you’re not using the right file format.

BRAND AUDIT STEP 3: It’s Time to Take A Deeper Dive

Ok, so maybe you answered “no” or “I don’t know” to a few of the questions in the last step. It’s ok, that’s why you’re here. We’ll take you through each question and suggest some “to dos” to get the most out of your brand audit.

Mission, Vision, Values?

Every organization should have a mission statement. How else can you connect to the “why” of what you do every day? What drives you? Why do you do this work? Consumers buy for the “why” not for the “what.” Especially in today’s world. The brands with the most loyal following are those that are purposeful about who they are and what they stand for. Consumers want to know a brand’s true personality and promise. They want to be able to relate to and buy into your values and vision. If you want to learn more about how important that “why” is, check out best-selling author Simon Sinek’s [Ted Talk](#).

Strengths and Weaknesses?

If you can’t identify what you do well and what needs improvement, it’s going to be hard to make any genuine branding decisions. If your customer service is less than great, then you can’t very well tout how amazing your customer service is in your key messages. It might hurt, but it’s incredibly important to try and take as objective a view as possible and determine what your real strengths are—so you can talk about them! And what your honest weaknesses are—so you can work to overcome them.

Competition, Differentiators, and Benefits?

We know you know who your competition is, but can you define—in detail—how you are different from them? What sets you apart? That's important. Guaranteed a prospect will be thinking it even if they don't ask it outright. (We get that question all the time from our prospective clients: "What makes you different from other agencies in the area? What sets you apart? How do you do things differently?") Know what makes you stand out and apart and be able to articulate it in a succinct and compelling way. Make a list of those "differentiators" and refer to it often.

Then make a list of benefits—what your customer or client gets from purchasing your product or investing in your service. This is not a list of features like your cool new production facility made out of recycled bamboo or your hi-tech packaging that plays show tunes when you open it. It's how your clients benefit from the new facility or packaging. This list refers to what people get out of working with you. How you solve their problems and make their lives better.

PRO TIP

Consider asking some of your favorite clients/customers why they chose you over a competitor. And why do they continue to buy from you? You may be surprised at what others consider to be your differentiators and your benefits.

Do you know what perceptions exist about your brand in the marketplace?

This is a tough one, right? How do you know what you don't know? Well, try talking to existing clients, customers, vendors, even professional contacts or friends—anyone who has experience with your organization. What's the word on the street about your company? What have they heard? And what has their experience been like working with you?

Also, consider sending out an anonymous web survey. In that way, you can encourage your clients/customers to provide the honest feedback they may be less inclined to provide in person. (Because they're obviously nice people and would never want to hurt your feelings.) If an anonymous survey makes sense for your business, here are a few easy-to-use options we recommend to get you started.

SurveyMonkey is a popular option when it comes to online survey tools. SurveyMonkey has an easy user interface, but if you want any extra bells and whistles, you'll need to pay.

There are other good options, too, like:

- Zoho Survey
- GetFeedback
- AskNicely
- ProProfs Survey Maker

Explore a few and see what feels most intuitive, user-friendly, and budget-friendly to you. Some programs charge based on how many questions you ask. Others charge based on how many people you want to reach.

What to ask in a survey

Once you've chosen the right survey platform for you, it's time to come up with the right questions to ask. Here are just a few questions to get you started but feel free to customize them to your industry and particular branding and marketing challenges:

- How did you first hear about ABC Company?
- How would you describe ABC Company?
- What are the services ABC Company offers?
- What are the strengths of ABC Company?
- What are the weaknesses or improvements that could be made at ABC Company?
- Would you recommend ABC to a friend? Why or why not?

Try to write straightforward questions with multiple choice or ranked choice answers. In that way, customers can move easily through your survey without getting frustrated or irritated that it's taking too long. Limit your free response questions to one or two and only if it's absolutely necessary.

When assessing responses, if, for example, you notice that respondents only list two services that your company offers when you actually offer ten, you know people don't know or understand all that you do. You may be missing out on additional business and/or referrals because you haven't correctly communicated your capabilities to your target market. Keep these kinds of things top of mind as you analyze your survey results.

Do you know who your target market is?

Age, gender, geographic location, interests, hobbies, media consumption habits?

When we ask new clients this question we generally hear "everyone" or "anyone in Maine is a potential customer," but those responses are too broad and prevent you from truly reaching the market you should be. And when you aren't talking to the market you should be, results aren't what they could be.

How do you define your target market? Spend some time thinking about your current or ideal consumer. What is their gender? How old are they? Are there interests that are unique to them? What professional organizations are they involved with? Which local organizations do they participate in? What are their hobbies? What social media channels do they frequent? Which radio stations do they listen to? Do they watch network television or prefer to stream? Once you've identified these traits and preferences, you know exactly who you are talking to and where you should be focusing your marketing efforts and dollars in order to reach them.

If you're having trouble drilling down to a specific market on your own, put some of these demographic, behavioral, and media consumption habit questions into your web survey. You'll learn a lot about your target market when you ask your current customers.

Do you have standard messaging that you can pull from when writing about your organization?

An elevator pitch, company descriptors, and professional bios of leadership? And are you telling your brand's story well and consistently?

Here at TBC, we call these core messages, "Key Messaging," and it provides an important foundation for your verbal brand. The better your company and the people in it know how to talk about your organization, services, and products, the better outsiders will understand what you have to offer and the more likely they will be to remember you.

Key Messaging is the guide for all of your brand's content—from marketing collateral to your website, throughout social media and in sales kits. Consistency and frequency of message make an enormous difference in shaping a positive perception of your brand in the hearts and minds of your target audience.

Do you have a professionally-designed logo and all the necessary high resolution files you need to display your logo in a variety of different media (eps, jpg, png, pdf, etc.)?

Your organization's logo is one of the cornerstones of your brand. It helps tell your story and attract your target market. Make sure it's representing you well. On the practical side, your logo should reproduce well in a variety of sizes, be highly legible in black and white, and should originate from a graphics program as a vector file.

Your logo is going to be the file people request from you the most—placing an ad, sponsoring an event, developing marketing materials—your logo should be on all of it. Make sure you have a variety of files so you can send them the correct one. Need more help understanding file formats? Check out our [blog](#) on the topic.

Redesigning your logo can be a costly endeavor so it makes sense to do it right from the start. We recommend hiring a professional. If you can't afford an agency, see if you can get a really good freelance designer (who understands branding) to design it for you. Promise, it will be worth the investment.

PRO TIP

If you have a modest printing budget, don't create a 4-color logo that will be costly to reproduce.

Do you have professional photography to use on your website and marketing materials?

Yep, we know, selfies are in. But this is your organization's brand and your selfie has no business sitting next to your professional bio on your website, LinkedIn profile, or any other marketing endeavor. Leave that for your personal Facebook page. Professional headshots are a must, and we encourage you to consider the same for any photographs used within your marketing materials.

PRO TIP

Search for Royalty Free stock images which are less expensive than Rights Managed photos and don't have usage restrictions.

We know photography can be expensive and it's tempting to DIY it, but professional photography will help set your organization apart and make you appear more reputable.

If hiring a professional isn't in the budget right now, look to high-quality stock photography options, which can be less costly.

Does your organization have a Brand Style Guide that outlines your visual and verbal brand rules?

A Brand Style Guide can exist in a printed or online format and outlines all the visual and verbal guidelines for your brand in one spot (i.e. visual presentation, identity, and key messaging.)

When we create a Brand Style Guide, it always includes the components listed below as well as any additional items that might be necessary for the client's specific needs and industry.

- Brand positioning statement
- Mission and vision statements
- Company manifesto
- Brand values and voice
- Tagline/slogans
- 25-, 50-, and 100-word descriptors
- Benefits and differentiators
- Elevator pitch
- Executive bios
- Target audience personas
- Names, naming conventions
- Logo + proper usage
- Primary, secondary color palettes
- Font usage

Why is the Brand Style Guide important? Because it keeps everyone in your company mindful of who your brand is, why your brand does what it does, and how you want to communicate your brand's story. With access to this information, everyone on your team knows how to articulate your brand consistently—day in and day out. And remember, consistency is key.

Hey, you made it through!

**You've got this Brand Audit stuff. No problemo.
You're well on your way to taking your brand to the next level.**

Need more help? Contact us at hello@warpweftbranding.com



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