

# BRAND CONSISTENCY AND HOW TO ACHIEVE IT

***Consistent branding creates consistent customers.***

Without brand consistency your organization risks confusing people about what you do, or failing to make a strong enough impression for them to remember you.

The problem is that many people don't fully understand its importance or how to accomplish it.

Whether you're a professional marketer who dreams of having your whole team on the same page, or you have had some marketing tasks added to your job description – this guide is for you.

**Attract more repeat business by focusing on brand consistency to build better awareness, recognition, and connections with your target audience.**

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# WHAT IS “BRAND CONSISTENCY”?

**Brand consistency is the practice of communicating your organization's core values and mission in recognizable, repetitious, and curated ways across all means of interaction.**

Good consistency in branding is proven to increase sales and profits through improved recognition, customer retention and loyalty.

No matter where, when, or how someone comes across your brand – *online, in print, on a t-shirt, or walking past a sign* – they should immediately recognize that it belongs to the same group.

In marketing, brand consistency includes using the same logo, color palette, fonts, graphics, general aesthetics, grammar and tone of voice in the same way for all of your “on brand” materials and communications.

*These business cards and catalogs by Portland clothing company Handful® are unified by the brand's signature orange color gradient, logo, and fonts.*



## WHY BRAND CONSISTENCY MATTERS

**Why is having consistency in branding so crucial?** At its core, consistency fulfills expectations, which builds trust and creates loyal customers, which in turn leads to income.

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**Without it, you risk confusing people about what you do, or you don't make a strong enough impression to be remembered.**

Brand consistency helps people recognize your brand out in the world and to quickly connect the dots of what you do, who you serve, where you operate and, most importantly, how you're relevant to them.

When people are confident in their understanding of what you're offering or asking them to do, they're more likely to want to try it. And when people repeatedly have good experiences with your brand, they're much more likely to keep choosing it when they come across it.

One survey by UK company onbuy.com of 1,063 consumers revealed that **71% said it was “very” or “somewhat” important that they recognize a brand name before making a purchase.**

Another survey by DeVries Global of 1,193 respondents aged 15-24 (Gen Z) suggests that of this younger age group, **85% prefer buying from familiar brands they have a positive view of over new or non-mainstream brands.**

# OTHER BENEFITS OF BRAND CONSISTENCY

**Attracting a new customer costs five times more on average in terms of marketing and sales resources than retaining an existing customer.** In addition, the likeliness of selling again to an existing customer is 60-70%, while the chances of selling to a new customer is 20% or less.

(Temkin Group Report: Economics of Net Promoter Score, 2016)

**Developing a consistent brand is one of the best proven ways to build your returning customer base, which makes marketing more cost-effective over time.**

Even when it comes to internal communications, keeping messaging aligned creates a sense of community, purpose, and professionalism. It also gives your customer-facing employees a better sense of how to represent your brand. This translates to your whole team having a clear understanding of your company and enables them to be better brand ambassadors.

## HOW TO ACHIEVE BRAND CONSISTENCY

***If brand consistency is so important, then why is it not prioritized as such in every company?***

While there are a number of common reasons, they all speak to one thing – **it's not typically built into the workflow.**

In order to deliver a unified look, feel, message, and experience across all channels and touchpoints, everyone who works on materials for your brand needs to be on the same page – literally.

**The best way to unify your brand is to create a written brand guide, distribute it throughout your organization, and make it part of the process to review new pieces to ensure they follow the set standards.**

Without this tool, you may have elements of branding – such as a logo, colors, or fonts – but the rest of your pieces are likely being created on-the-fly, often by different individuals. This can quickly lead to your professional presence looking disconnected, messy, and unclear.

Share your company's brand guide with all employees, contract workers, vendors, and anyone who will work on branded materials. When everyone is referencing the same guide it becomes easier to ensure everything is aligned.

If you don't have an official Marketing Team, consider appointing one or two people on your team to be Brand Managers, charged with checking all branded materials against the guide to verify they meet the standards for consistency.

Developing built-in processes of accountability for maintaining brand standards will help you create consistency for every facet of your brand.





# WHAT EXACTLY IS A “BRAND?”

Before you can establish guidelines for it, you first need to identify what your “brand” is comprised of. What exactly is a “brand” anyway?

One way to think of a brand is as the imagined personality of an organization – how they would style themselves, where they would hang out, who they would talk to, how they would interact with others, and what motivates them.

Once you’ve decided the character traits of your brand, managing brand consistency becomes about making sure that all “on brand” materials look, sound, and feel like they fit your brand’s personality. Most importantly, everything must point back to your brand’s purpose – the reason your brand exists, beyond making a profit.

**As an example, let’s compare two brand personalities – Werther’s Originals® and Mattel’s Barbie®.**

A look at Werther’s Originals branding brings to mind old fashioned comforts as well as old fashioned tastes. Their messaging often points to the company’s humble beginnings in 1909, and their 100+ years of experience.

The warm, caramel-colored brand palette keeps everything visually soft and almost sepia-toned, which enhances the old-world feel. Their photography often depicts their products being shared in moments of closeness, as well as close-up shots of caramel goodness. The personality of this brand could be described as traditional, warm, comforting, and reliable. They want to bring people together with sweet moments of comfort and shared happiness.



In contrast, Mattel’s Barbie brand is bright, colorful, and visually dominating. Their marketing is full of words like “**#unapologetic**” and “**If you can dream it, you can be it.**” Most everything features the trademarked Barbie pink, along with a rainbow of complimentary colors.

Their photography focuses on the dolls themselves, while featuring a diverse spread of individuals enjoying Barbie’s world. The personality of this brand can be called progressive, outgoing, ambitious, inclusive, and boisterous. They want to positively influence the world in a meaningful way through the power of play.

You can see by this comparison that brands can have drastically different personalities, just like people do. Your brand might not say or do the same things another brand would, because it doesn’t fit your brand’s personality – **it wouldn’t feel consistent.**

# BRAND COMPONENTS

The first step towards creating consistency is to develop an understanding of the parts of your branding that need guidelines created around them. Here's a breakdown of the main components you'll want to cover in your Brand Guide.

**Messaging** – what your brand says to customers/prospects.

Your message is what you're telling people – what your products or services can do for them, how you can help them save money, or how they can help save the world by donating today.

**It's important that your messaging is relevant to your audience and understood clearly.** If your messages are disjointed, it will confuse people and they won't pay attention to what you're trying to say.



The message of this advertisement for Uber Eats delivery service is that they now deliver more than food. The play on their name (Don't Eats) is simple, clever, and easy to grasp.

**Tone / Voice** – how your brand says things.

How you word a message can impact the meaning of it, who will relate to it, and how it is perceived. Ideally, when people interact with your brand they feel like they are interacting with the same personality every time.

While your brand may have a few different “tones of voice,” similar to how people speak differently in professional versus casual settings, the overall use of grammar, syntax, and word choice should follow the same set of guidelines to keep them unified.



The tone of voice Jamba® uses is friendly, energetic, and humorous – like this play on words to promote a fundraising program.

## WHAT TRAITS FIT YOUR BRAND'S TONE OF VOICE?

Formal	Professional
Casual	Irreverent
Humorous	Enthusiastic
Serious	Matter-of-fact
Optimistic	Sophisticated
Motivating	Youthful
Respectful	Energetic
Assertive	Laid-back
Conversational	Empowering

## Visual Identity – how your brand looks.

Your visual identity includes all visual elements of your brand, including your logo, colors, fonts, photo styles, graphics or icons, layout preferences, and beyond. These are the building blocks for every design, marketing piece, website, e-mail, newsletter, social media post, etc. that your brand puts out.

One big goal of marketing is to keep attracting attention, so it's natural that your brand's style will need to change and evolve over time. But the core traits and visual markers of your brand identity should remain consistent, even through style changes.



1999 Apple® iMac Advertisement



2021 Apple® iMac Advertisement

*These ads for Apple® iMac computers were created 22 years apart, but they still look and feel like part of the same brand. The visual similarities – including the image composition, use of white space, limited text, and clean backgrounds – are consistent, even though the style of fonts and colors choices are different.*

## Experience – how people engage with your brand.

If your message, tone, and visuals all proclaim that your brand will deliver X, but the lived experience does not match that expectation, you will lose trust with customers. The path to consistency must start from how your brand actually interacts with people in the real world.

If your team loves being personable and relaxed with customers, but your marketing message, tone, and visuals all point to a no-nonsense, business-like operation, there is a disconnect between the experience you are advertising and what you are delivering.

**The goal is to accurately represent the experience people have when they engage with your brand.** When people's expectations are met, they are more likely to return for future experiences.



*Trader Joe's famously provides their customers with a shopping experience that keeps them coming back.*

*Their fun, nautical theme is backed by enthusiastic and knowledgeable crew members, hand-painted signage, exciting new products, and of course in-store samples. This brand knows that the consistent experience they deliver is building loyalty and trust with their customers.*



# GUIDING FACTORS

There are many decisions to make when it comes to establishing brand guidelines. Some are more concrete, like deciding which version of your logo will be the “primary” one utilized in most applications. Other factors are more conceptual, such as how to describe the right tone of voice.

**Before you start defining parameters for your brand, you’ll want to prepare yourself with some key pieces of information to aid in your decision making process.**

## 1. Your business’ Mission, Purpose, and Vision statements.

**These short statements are intended to provide direction and relevance to everything your company does.**

Mission statements can sometimes seem like vague puffery. But a well-written mission clearly communicates to everyone – internal and external – why the organization exists beyond the obvious “to make a profit.” There are many ways to make money – ***the most successful businesses exist because someone had a passionate idea.***

As an example, let’s examine the outdoor recreational company REI. Their tagline is “A life outdoors is a life well-lived.” A quick look at their website’s About Us page, and we find their purpose; ***“We believe that it’s in the wild, untamed and natural places that we find our best selves, so our purpose is to awaken a lifelong love of the outdoors, for all.”***



Further down we find a blurb about the history of the company, stating it was founded when a group of friends ***“united by their love for the outdoors, decided to source quality and affordable gear for their adventures.”***

A last line in their brief “Who we are” section states ***“with every purchase you make with REI, you are choosing to steward the outdoors, support sustainable business and help the fight for life outside.”***

**Their mission: To source quality and affordable gear for outdoor adventures.**

**Their purpose: To awaken a lifelong love of the outdoors for all.**

**Their vision: A world where we steward the outdoors, support sustainable business, and help the fight for life outside.**

REI’s mission, purpose, and vision are clear, concise, and easy to understand. Every branded message, webpage, advertisement, and social media post points back to these guiding factors to reinforce them to their audience consistently.

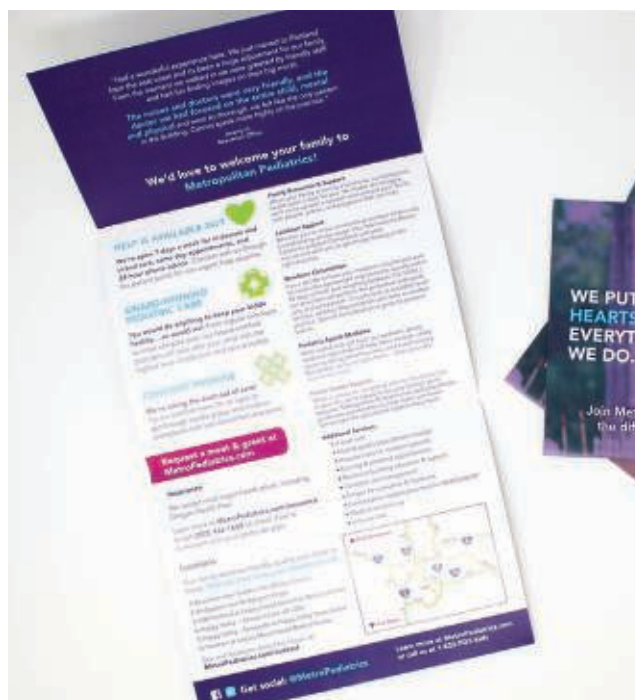
**If your organization doesn’t have a clear mission statement, purpose, and vision written down, creating them is a crucial step.** Doing this first will give you a solid foundation to build from every time you sit down to create a new piece of branded materials.

## 2. Your past successes.

Marketing sometimes feels like a “guess and check” game, and in part that is true.

**A key part of marketing is tracking results so we know what works or what we need to change.** By identifying the most effective marketing or sales materials you’ve created in the past, you can *use these common traits to help create guidelines based on strategies you know work for your business.*

These successes could be mail pieces from which you received a good response, an e-mail that works well for closing sales, top-performing social media posts, or the most visited pages on your website. Compare them and pick out any themes you notice – similar language, use of photos or colors, the amount of text used, etc. By the end of this exercise, you’ll have a list of the most successful brand attributes you’ve used so far.



*These fold-out service brochures for Metropolitan Pediatrics were created using content from other marketing materials that were successful for them.*



## 3. Your customer’s feedback.

**Another great resource are the people who currently enjoy your products or services.**

Gather feedback about your customers’ perceptions of your brand. Ask what they like about it, what makes sense, and what might be confusing to them. This will help you see your brand through your target audience’s eyes. Once you better understand how others see your brand, you’ll have a clearer idea of what to alter or how to strengthen positive perceptions.

***Sending out a brief survey, or creating a campaign that asks for input in exchange for an incentive are both engaging ways of gathering insights.*** If you have close working relationships, such as longterm partners or customers you’re friends with outside the workplace, consider if you feel comfortable reaching out to them for a candid conversation about how they view your brand.



# THINGS TO AVOID

There are a few mistakes that are easy to make when trying to create brand consistency. Keep the following things in mind while planning your brand guide – and for all future marketing endeavors.

## 1. Trend-Chasing

One obstacle that can stand in the way of achieving consistency is the urge to constantly change up your brand's style in the hopes of attracting new customers.

While evolving your brand's style naturally helps you to stay relevant, it's disadvantageous to change too much too quickly. ***Especially if you are chasing the latest trends, trying to emulate other brands, or simply following your own personal preferences.***

Making decisions based on fleeting influences brings confusion and uncertainty to your messaging. Stick to informed guidelines, while making small changes to give your branding a broader range of styles. This will provide the needed consistency to build brand recognition, while keeping things fresh, exciting, and new.

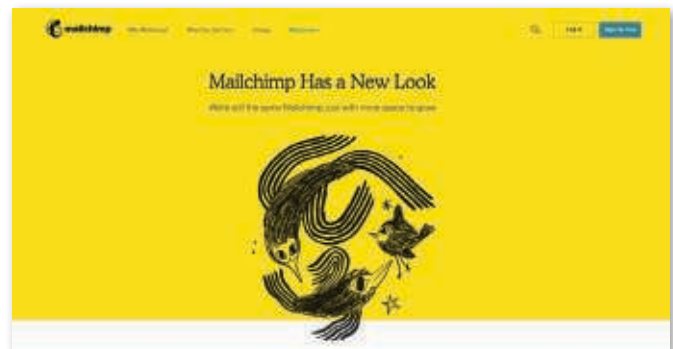
### TRENDY



This style of illustration became widely popular for digital content around 2010, and many artists are still producing illustrations with it. Because they are easy to access and trendy, many brands use them (trust us, we've been there!)

Using a trendy or widely-produced style of artwork in your branding limits your ability to make it truly "yours." It is indistinguishable from other brands using the same style, and becomes just one of many to people who come across it.

### UNIQUE



MailChimp® has developed their own unique hand-drawn illustration style for use in their branding. It is original to them, and instantly recognizable to their customers. Their consistency in style, color palette, and choice of subjects to illustrate all work together as part MailChimp®'s visual identity.

## 2. Biases and Tone-Deafness

There is often a difference in how we see ourselves, and how others see us. The same is true of your marketing. Because you're on the inside, you will inherently view your branding more favorably than others will. This can lead to making decisions based on assumptions of how your customers see your brand, rather than their real opinions.

In addition, the personal biases we hold from our individual experiences influence how we interpret messages. Be aware that how you interpret a message may not be how everyone else will see it.

**As marketers and professionals, we can develop a tendency to project our own preferences and beliefs onto our customers. We assume that others think and feel as we do.**

This is known as "the false consensus effect." It's natural to think that if we prefer or feel a certain way about something, others will too – but that's not always the case. Staying aware of our own preferences and feelings about a given topic helps to keep this in check.

When you write messaging without considering how it will be seen from other's perspectives, you risk alienating people. It can lead to customers feeling like you aren't relevant to them, confusing them with conflicting messages, or possibly offending them.

**It's important to limit biases from influencing your brand's marketing as much as possible through careful consideration and involving outside perspectives in the process.**

Gather customer research and evidence to inform your messaging and visuals, rather than guessing at what your customers think and want.

Also be aware of how your messaging could be interpreted by individuals from all walks of life – think about how your word choice and portrayal of people in your marketing will come across to the wide audience it will come in contact with.



Above: This ad for Mr. Clean® Magic Erasers from 2011 missed the mark with its Mother's Day message. The image of the woman cleaning with her daughter implies that this brand believes a mother's "job" is cleaning – and that in the future the girl will clean, too. This message received heavy backlash for being a sexist misrepresentation of motherhood.

Right: An example of tone-deaf advertising, this campaign by PETA was intended to encourage people to go vegetarian by implying that they could help save animals and lose weight. However, it was not well-received and the nonprofit was called out for body-shaming.



### 3. Monotony

While the goal of brand consistency is to create a unified look and feel, don't confuse that with everything looking the exact same all the time. Branding is most successful when it stays current and relevant, and can keep attracting attention from your target audience. It's equally as important to shake things up – in the right way.

**For an example of how to keep things consistent, while also keeping things interesting, let's look at a West Coast favorite – Dutch Bros. Coffee.**

If you were to line up the past year's worth of Dutch Bros. marketing campaigns, you'd see a wide array of design styles. Different background colors, fonts, and graphic styles are used for each month's theme – but they all still feel like Dutch Bros.



Above are six seasonal Dutch Bros menu posters, demonstrating a consistent layout and photography style. To the right of them are three sticker designs, unified by their colors, style, and positive word choice – each features the windmill logomark to clearly identify them as Dutch Bros designs.

The consistent use of their logo, bright colors, and language, as well as always featuring images of their beverage cups with the windmill logomark, helps customers instantly recognize this brand. Their design styles are always fun, high energy, bright, and use brief but eye-catching text. Using a consistent layout for their common pieces – like menus – also helps by delivering information in the same way, even though the appearance changes.

**Establishing a brand guide will help you keep critical elements consistent, while showing you where you have the freedom to change things up. This will allow you to create a brand that is uniquely “itself” in a reliable way – like an old friend with a fantastic wardrobe.**



# YOU'RE IN CONTROL

**Brand consistency is critical to successful marketing.** Your message, voice, visuals, and experience should align and work together to engage people and bring them into your story.

Create better consistency by building steps in your team's workflow that ensure all materials meet the set brand standards.

**Keeping an up to date Brand Guide driven by your organization's mission, vision, and purpose will help your team manage brand consistency across all platforms.**

Make marketing decisions informed by customer insights and evidence that supports your reasoning to avoid traps like following trends, assuming your customer's viewpoints mirror your own, or becoming boring and overlooked.

**The task of marketing is never over.** There will always be a need to reinvent, redesign, and restate your messaging to keep attracting attention from your target audiences. The consistent elements you decide on act as the guardrails for creativity, so your brand looks professional and well-thought out while also being able to stay relevant and fresh.

**Remember that you're in control.** If you don't like something, you aren't stuck with it for consistency's sake – change it! Just remember to consider how your brand's "personality" would handle the transition.



The NICWA (National Indian Child Welfare Association) brand is visually soft, supported by a tribal-inspired logo design depicting a swaddled child in a basket. Their established style of photography is altered to look handpainted, and their preferred paper for printed communications is a linen textured stock that feels natural and organic. Their colors, fonts, and layouts are consistent, while their visuals are intriguing, beautiful, and authentic to their mission.