

QUICKSTART GUIDE TO MARKETING: YOUR VERBAL IDENTITY

*“What’s in a name? That which we call a rose,
by any other word would smell as sweet.”*

A lovely sentiment from Shakespeare... But in branding and business, **we know that success relies on how we deliver the message just as much as what we have to offer.**

One of the primary ways brands connect with people is through **messaging**. Not only does a brand need to have the right solution at the right time, but it needs to be delivered in the right way. The part of your brand that guides and aligns your messaging is your **Verbal Identity**.

Developing your Verbal Identity goes hand in hand with your Visual Identity. It helps define brand characteristics like tone of voice, word choice, use of humor, seriousness, and more. In Brand Development, Visual and Verbal Identity are two halves of the same coin.

A brand’s identity is driven by an organization’s mission, purpose, and vision, and should be further developed using customer profiles. These profiles are built using specific target customer demographics, psychographics, and behavior data.

The goal of having a verbal identity as part of your brand guide to reference is to create consistency in your messaging. Your marketing presence in the world should feel like one connected conversation. Effective messaging always points back to the brand’s larger purpose – **why you exist in the first place, beyond simply to make a profit.**

As a business entrepreneur or professional, we know your main goal is to make money – why else would you be in business? But people generally don’t care passionately about how much money a business is making. People don’t become loyal to a brand just to help the company out.

People become loyal customers to brands that align with their personal beliefs and principles. To create that kind of loyalty for your business, your identity must speak to the deeper, philosophical reasons you went into business.



Wendy’s fast-food brand is well-known for their humorous posts and engagement on social media. What makes it acceptable for some brands to act this way, but maybe not others? It’s all about what fits with their Verbal Identity.

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PURPOSE, VISION, AND MISSION

What do you stand for? What problems do you help solve? How will your company be different? Once you answer these important questions, it becomes easier to write messaging that connects with people who also believe in your larger purpose.



REI's #OptOutside campaign was started as a way to spread the word that stores would be closed on Black Fridays, as a way to encourage people to go outside rather than go shopping.

To examine the differences between purpose, vision, and mission statements, let's look at a world-famous brand, REI. The Recreational Equipment, Inc. is a top-brand gear, clothing, and outdoor equipment supplier. Their primary tagline is, **"A Life Outdoors is a Life Well Lived."**

Purpose (Why we do it.):

Our purpose is to awaken a lifelong love of the outdoors, for all.

Vision (How we wish the world were.):

Every person is connected to the power of the outdoors and engaged in the fight to protect it.

Mission (How we do it.):

We bring you top-quality gear and apparel, expert advice, rental equipment, inspiring stories of life outside and outdoor experiences.

Your purpose should clearly state why your organization exists. This is the overarching reason for your existence – your main motivation. Whether you got into landscaping because you love stewarding residential land or started a food truck because you wanted to connect people with a shared love of food – every business owner has a deeper purpose for choosing their specific business activity. Write yours out in a way that calls out to people with similar beliefs.

Your vision outlines what you hope to achieve by existing. What would the world look like if you fulfilled your purpose? Would every yard in Portland be a pollinator's paradise? Would the city feel more connected to their roots after eating your authentic recipes? Paint the picture so everyone can see how much better the world would be if they supported your brand.

Your mission is how you'll achieve your vision. This ties into your business activities and services and says how those actions will help your organization reach their goals. For our landscaping example, this could be something like; *"We provide expert landscaping planning and education to help you create a healthy, natural environment around your home."* Tell prospects and customers exactly how you intend to make your vision become a reality.

WHY IT MATTERS

"I think that this is something that a new business doesn't always see as important in the early days. At the beginning, you better understand your motivations and what good you hope to create in the world. Use those feelings of inspiration and excitement while you have them! By developing this and writing it down, it helps to build a foundation for the future. 'Future you' will thank you for it!"

- Janey Greenlees, business owner since 2000, AnchorPointe Graphics

In recent years, it's become even more important to people that they feel good about the brands they buy from. Consumers are paying more attention to how businesses impact their families, communities, and the environment.

"Raised awareness of social and environmental issues has shifted the consumer mindset towards more responsible shopping habits. With greater access to information shoppers are doing their research to check that the brands they buy from operate in an ethical way – and those that don't get the chop."

Our survey results show 70% of people now actively seek sustainable brands to buy from, and 82% would stop buying from an unethical brand completely." (Survey via Work.Life, 2022 Instagram poll of 1,650 participants.)

In addition, other research shows up to "78% of US consumers want companies to address important social justice issues," and "87% will purchase a product because a company advocated for an issue they cared about." (2017 Cone Communications CSR Study)

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Having meaningful purpose, mission, and vision statements that resonate with many people will help your business succeed.

CUSTOMER PROFILES

It's difficult to market your business effectively to a group of people if you don't know who they are.

The goal of creating **customer profiles** is to provide everyone on your team with a clear idea of who you're talking to. It's a good idea to create multiple profiles to fit each of your main target audiences.

For example, let's say you want to market your services to both residential and commercial clients. These two groups have drastically different needs and are looking for different solutions. You'll need unique profiles to represent each to develop accurate messaging.

Other information that might be helpful to include are known interests, hobbies, whether your ideal customer has children, pets, or is a homeowner, has a vehicle, travels frequently, and other behavioral traits.



These two customer profiles were developed for a Ride-Sharing App. They provide an easy way to imagine who this service markets to, what their unique needs and desires are, and what benefits of the service they're most likely to be interested in.

ONLINE RESOURCE:

As a place to start, here's a collection of **8 Free Buyer Persona Templates** to check out.

Scan the QR Code!



Your profiles should be informed by real customer data, either gathered from your own customers or from another reliable source. It's okay to use generic consumer data based on similar businesses to get started.

Once you've generated enough of your own customer history to get new insights from, you can go back and update your personas. In fact, updating your profiles as you gather new information should be a regular part of your marketing efforts!

PERSONALITY

Once you've clarified *who you're talking to*, you can outline *how your brand is going to engage with them*.

The goal of establishing a personality for your brand is to help create consistency in your messaging across all platforms, touchpoints, and marketing endeavors. You want people who interact with your brand to feel like they're engaging with the same entity, every time.

A strong verbal identity helps you deliver messages in ways that will be well-received and clearly understood by your target audiences.

It helps your marketing connect with the right prospects, and helps you retain your most valuable clients by helping them relate to your brand on a more personal level. Just like in our personal lives, we prefer those we have things in common with.

Though your tone of voice may change situationally (*more on that later*), your brand's personality remains the same. One exercise to start with is to create a simple list of your brand's desired personality traits.

EXAMPLE PERSONALITY TRAITS:

Honest	Hard-working
Down to earth	Successful
Optimistic	Luxurious
Imaginative	Glamorous
Daring	Tough
Reliable	Outdoorsy
Well-informed	Adventurous
Youthful	Distinguished

Define 4-5 personality traits that strongly represent your brand. Reference them when creating messaging to ensure that your communication pieces feel like they embody your brand personality.



What personality traits would you guess are in the Adidas® Verbal Identity? Perseverant? Driven? Athletic?

TONE OF VOICE

While your personality defines you as a whole, the tone of voice you use in any given situation changes.

In some instances you are casual, use slang terms, and give humorous responses. In others, you feel the need to be somber, subdued, and conservative with your replies.

The same is true for your brand – the tone of voice you choose for a message depends on the content, audience, and channel of communication being used. This means that you should have a selection of voices defined for your brand, ready to use for a variety of circumstances.

Think about the different types of communication your business needs to send. Will you send a monthly newsletter? Direct mail letters? Will you have an e-mail list?

Create a list that you can separate into categories. For each category, you can create a tone of voice to fit.



Most of the time, professional communication falls into three categories:

Promotional – Marketing materials intended to attract new customers and close sales.

Informative – Educational materials intended to build authority and trust with prospects.

Operative – Relevant information about business operations that impact customers.

Promotional – Sales and marketing materials are intended to capture attention and create connection. This is where brands try their best to stand out with thought-provoking and edgy messaging. For this category of communication, your tone of voice can be casual, more conversational, and show off your brand's personality to the fullest.

Informative – Blog posts, newsletters, and professional guides are all examples of informative brand messaging. Try for a tone of voice that shows you have authority as an expert in your field. This communication style typically isn't as 'flashy' as promotional messaging and may sound more scholastic than conversational.

Operative – Business operations; these utilitarian communications are necessary, but typically don't need to convey a lot of personality. This tone of voice can be direct, no-frills, and all-business. However, if it fits with your brand personality, feel free to add a bit of flavor where it makes sense. Sometimes a play on words or a perfectly placed pun can turn an invoice into a memorable moment for your customers.

TEXT STYLES & GRAMMAR

Many marketing messages are read – not heard. This can make conveying your tone of voice in writing a challenge. *But don't worry – you can use text styles, grammar, and punctuation to help!*

Similar to tone of voice, your writing style may change based on the situation. Whether you're crafting a casual social media post or are addressing a community concern will impact your word choice and delivery. We want our messages to be read and interpreted as intended by everyone who sees them. Sometimes, this means straying from traditional writing rules.

To sound natural and conversational, writers use a balance of traditional grammar and conversational syntax. You can employ the same techniques when writing messaging for your brand. Creative use of punctuation, short sentences, variations in font styles, and other visual cues can help convey a tone of voice and add emphasis where it would be spoken.

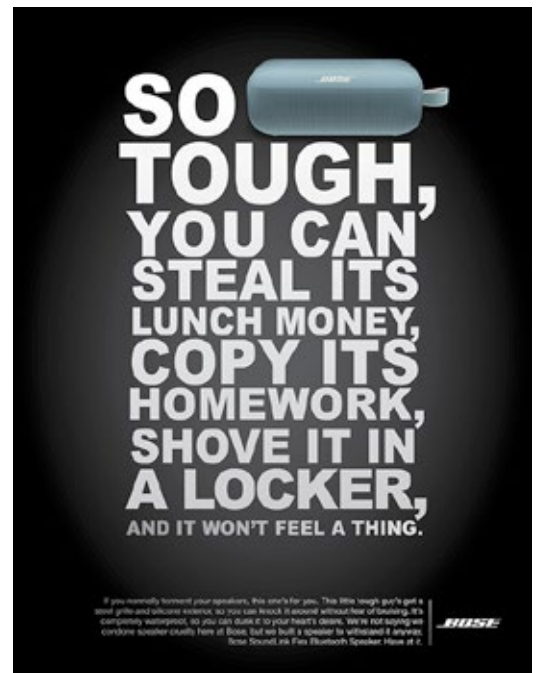
Here are a few examples of using text styles to change how things are interpreted:

When a word is all-capitalized, we tend to read it as a SHOUT.

In contrast, when part of a sentence is in parentheses, we interpret it as a softer voice (or maybe even an inner thought).

Traditionally, we use italics to denote the title or name of a specific work, like *Romeo & Juliet*. But you can also italicize text to *guide the inner monologue* to emphasize the right words.

Bold text is also used to add emphasis and can help **specific information** stand out.



This ad for a Bose® speaker is a great example of how text styling and grammar can help develop a strong tone of voice - even in print!

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Your Verbal Identity as a brand stems from your purpose, vision, and mission as an organization. These are the key pieces of your brand that drive everything else towards your goals.

With data-informed customer personas, you can make sure you know who you're talking to when you sit down to write a message. And knowing what your brand's personality, tone of voice, and writing styles are ahead of time will help you make confident decisions about your marketing while keeping all of your materials aligned, consistent, and on-brand.