

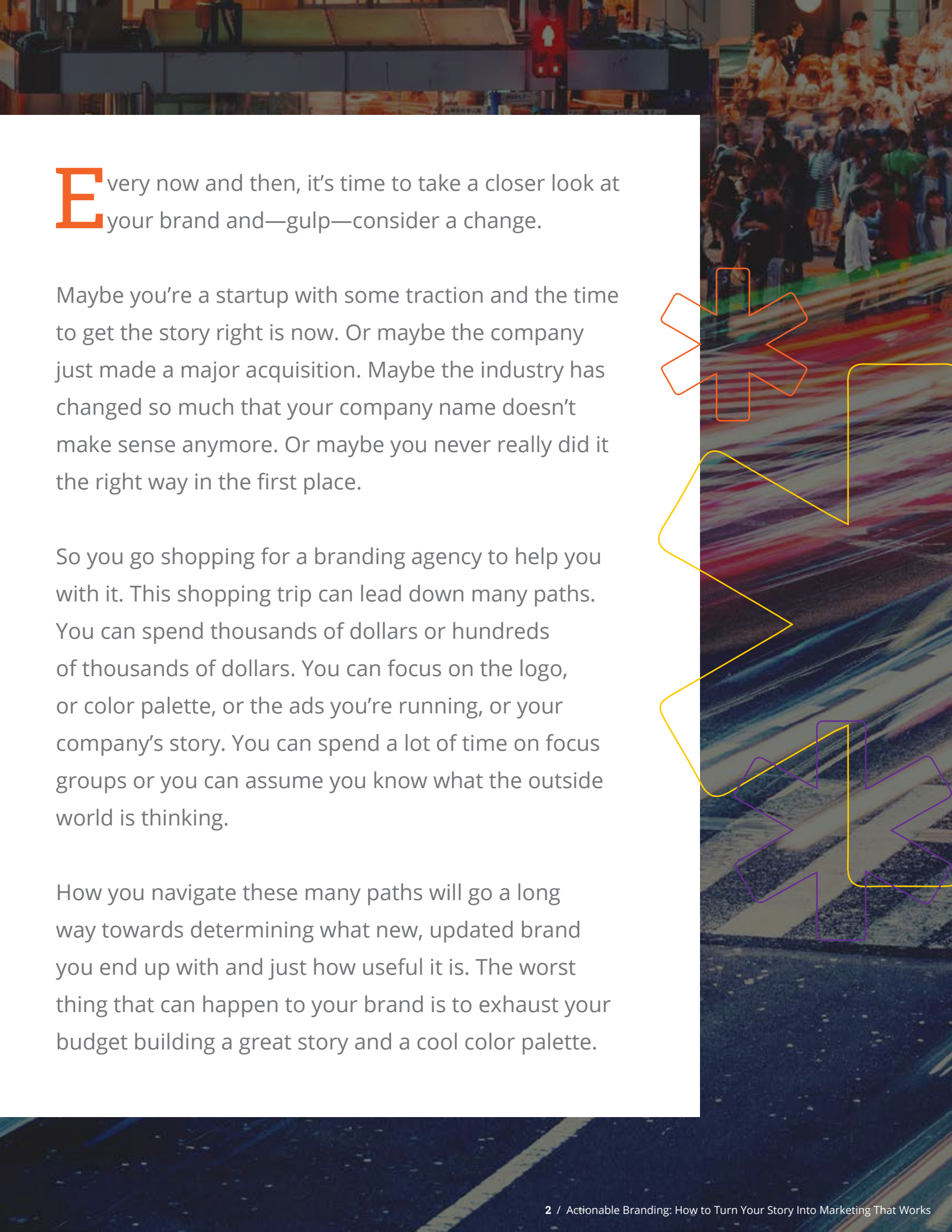


Actionable Branding:

How to Turn Your Story into
Marketing That Works

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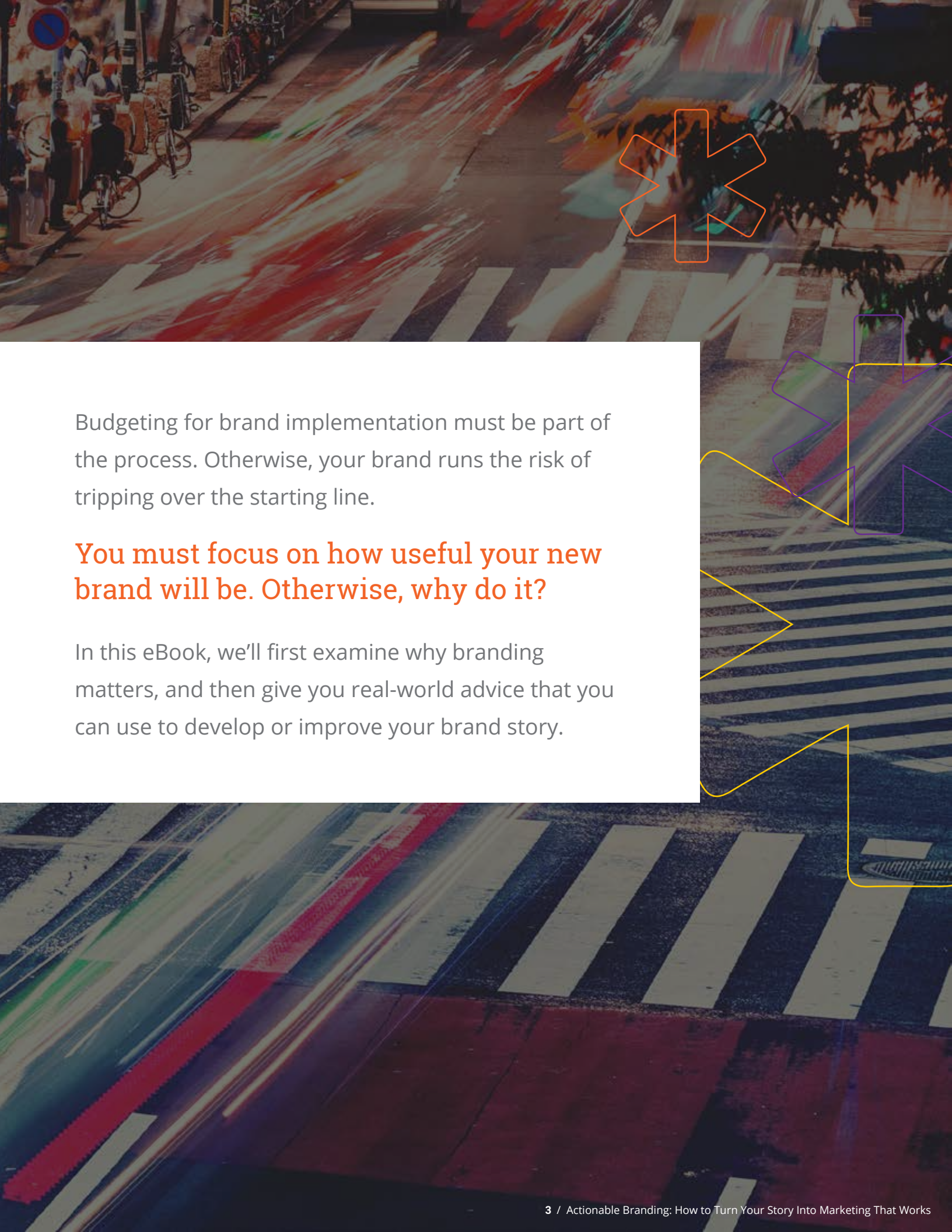


Every now and then, it's time to take a closer look at your brand and—gulp—consider a change.

Maybe you're a startup with some traction and the time to get the story right is now. Or maybe the company just made a major acquisition. Maybe the industry has changed so much that your company name doesn't make sense anymore. Or maybe you never really did it the right way in the first place.

So you go shopping for a branding agency to help you with it. This shopping trip can lead down many paths. You can spend thousands of dollars or hundreds of thousands of dollars. You can focus on the logo, or color palette, or the ads you're running, or your company's story. You can spend a lot of time on focus groups or you can assume you know what the outside world is thinking.

How you navigate these many paths will go a long way towards determining what new, updated brand you end up with and just how useful it is. The worst thing that can happen to your brand is to exhaust your budget building a great story and a cool color palette.

The background of the entire page is a blurred, high-speed photograph of a city street. In the upper left, a crosswalk with white stripes is visible. To the right of the crosswalk, there is a large, stylized red star graphic with a white outline. The star is positioned in the upper right quadrant of the page. The overall image has a sense of motion and urban activity.

Budgeting for brand implementation must be part of the process. Otherwise, your brand runs the risk of tripping over the starting line.

You must focus on how useful your new brand will be. Otherwise, why do it?

In this eBook, we'll first examine why branding matters, and then give you real-world advice that you can use to develop or improve your brand story.

Why Branding Matters

When it comes to creating the next product, building out a marketing plan and going to market, it's often difficult for companies to figure out who they are and why they're better than the next widget maker.

When businesses focus more on the products they sell than the audiences they are targeting, trouble will ultimately start brewing. The people buying your product don't want to hear about the backend of your platform or read a list of features—at least not when they are first getting to know you.

Rather, it's up to marketers to create a connection from the product and company to the buyer—whether that's in a B2C space or a B2B space.

Marketers have to learn to tell stories, or narratives, that connect a brand to its customers, with a focus on linking what you stand for to the values you share with your customers. It's the “why” of your business.

Unfortunately, history shows us there are plenty of businesses across all industries who have managed to exist without defining their purpose, or they lose sight of it altogether. They muddy the waters of the “brand,” forget their audience and eventually collapse.



Brands Who've Lost Sight of What They Stand For

Take J. Crew. The historically preppy brand continues to offer \$200 blazers at a time when many young people are dressing more casually at work and follow fast fashion trends peddled by H&M, Zara and Old Navy. The creative director, who pioneered their look, left in 2017 at a time when the brand was experiencing an identity crisis and fit issues. Their new chief creative is changing up the brand to appeal to a wide audience, which makes it harder to define. Leadership turnovers and the decision to sell the brand on Amazon [signal that the company is struggling.](#)

Slack recently changed its logo to a more refined mark, and [vowed to better align visual marketing pieces across the brand.](#) The change was met with the typical uproar and criticism from their user community. That makes perfect sense, but Slack hasn't really discussed how their evolving visual brand ties back to their brand story. In fact, in the blog announcing their logo update, they even mention they don't plan to explain how the logo change fits into their larger brand: "We'll not bore you with the design thinking and the meaning of every angle and curve of the new logo." Honestly, though, it would be helpful to hear that. Slack's audience wants



to understand why the changes took place and what it means for their brand story.

We see this with brands who realize they need help creating their brand story and developing an actionable marketing strategy around it. They recognize that today's customers are in charge and the brand needs to make that connection to have staying power. We're living in a time where everyone has multiple options for whatever they're buying. And it's easier than ever to buy. If your brand doesn't have much of a purpose—or you lose sight of it—it'll become increasingly more difficult to connect with your audience.



Your Brand is Your Story, and Your Story is Your Strategy

A brand without a compelling story has limits. When a brand has a story, the story gives it purpose. As venture capitalist Ben Horowitz famously said, the company story is the company strategy for successful organizations.

“Strategy” is a plan of action designed to achieve a major goal. A “story” is a report of connected events that lead to a conclusion. Figuring out what this story is and how to tell it to your audience becomes your strategy.

Your story starts with “why?” When you answer “why?” for your brand, you provide purpose to everyone that touches the organization—employees, partners, customers—everyone. “Why” is the essence of your story.

Trust Through Storytelling

At Scribewise, our “why?” is to create “trust through storytelling.” Our mission is to strengthen the connection between our clients and their customers, most notably with a content-first approach to marketing. Content is the core of our strategy, and so it was obvious that we had to travel this path.

Successful organizations have compelling stories that people unite behind and decide to invest in. A story revolves around the main characters, and tells where you’ve been and where you’re going. It provides a path to get through the difficult times. It’s a GPS that you can refer to when you’re not sure which direction you should head in, or when you feel as if you’re lost.

What Does a Story-based Brand Look Like?

Let's define what a story-based brand is by defining what it isn't. Your brand isn't a logo, your website, your company history, a product or platform, your tagline, a blog post, infographic or eBook.

Your brand is your story, and your story is your strategy. Without knowing what your story is, your brand doesn't exist. You have to understand what your purpose is, then create connections with your audience around your story. This story becomes your brand.

Importantly, the hero of your brand story is not your company—it's your customer. You're the guide who helps the hero achieve something great. A company that puts its customer at the heart of its story is a company poised for big things.



The Elements of Your Brand

While the essence of your brand ultimately lies in the minds of those around you—your customers, employees and competitors—it's up to you and your team to distribute messages that promote who you are as a company, what you stand for, and what you provide the marketplace.

These are the intangible feelings one gets when they interact with your brand—and they must be built on a solid foundation of values and a theme of why your organization exists.

Here are the elements of your brand and some questions to help you create these all-important building blocks of your brand.



What You Stand For (WYSF)

What You Stand For is the central theme of why your organization exists, captured in a short, simple phrase. This is the foundation of your organization that will help guide strategy and drive decisions. When it comes to expanding your business, taking on a new client, making a high profile hire or creating a new product, turn to your WYSF for guidance.

Brand-Building Questions

1. What do all of your products and services have in common?
2. No matter what twists and turns your company takes, what is its true aim?
3. Why do you exist?

Values

Every brand starts within an organization. We define your values as the best behaviors of your best employees on their best days.

Brand-Building Questions

1. Think of the employees who often go above and beyond. What characteristics do they share?
2. To “wow” your customers, what qualities should your employees possess?

Mission and Vision

Your mission and vision are concise statements of who you are. Specifically, mission answers what you do and why you do it, and vision answers where the company intends to go in the future and how it will get there.

Brand-Building Questions

1. Think big picture: What do you, as a company, do and why? Importantly, the answer is not what a product does.
2. What's your aspirational goal for the future of the company?



Brand Story

Your brand story is the narrative of your organization, its approach to business, and how it got to where it is today. It's not a history of your organization, but it could include elements about why the business started in the first place. Your brand story should contain the key messages, voice and tone of your brand. Though the document is created for an internal audience, all or part of it could be used to explain to your audience who you are as a brand.

From your brand story, it should be easy to develop other marketing messages.

Brand-Building Questions

1. Consider your mission, vision, values and WYSF. How do those brand elements influence your approach to business?
2. Why should an employee work for your company? Why should a prospective client hire you?
3. How would you describe the voice and tone of your brand?
4. Who are you trying to reach?

Elevator Pitch

An elevator pitch is simply a shorter version of your brand story. Done well, an elevator pitch is a 20- to 30-second explanation of what your company is and why it exists. And it's not just for salespeople—the elevator pitch should be easily recited by everyone across your organization.

Brand-Building Questions

1. If you had 20 seconds to describe your brand story, what would you say?



Brand Personality Traits

Now we're getting into the customer-facing traits. Brand personality traits are the outward manifestation of your values. These are how your customers and prospects experience the reflection of those values.

Brand-Building Questions

1. If your brand were a person, how would it speak?
2. How does your brand feel to your customers?

Customer Insight

Your customer insight is the problem the customer is trying to solve that your offering helps them overcome. It's important to define this to ensure that the brand story fulfills your customers' primary concern.

Brand-Building Questions

1. What's the primary problem your brand solves for your customers?

Customer Benefits

What do your customers get from you that they don't get from anyone else? Customer benefits are the value that your customers receive from working with you.

These elements create the foundation of your brand and set up your company to start building a positive presence in your industry.

Brand-Building Questions

1. What sets you apart from your competition?
2. What benefits are your customers looking for?



Building Your Actionable Brand

Creating a strong brand foundation where you've aligned your company values with your customer insight and figured out what you stand for and your brand story means you've got the keys to developing marketing messaging. These elements can set your brand in motion and can translate to all of your marketing materials.



Brand Guidelines

Marketing your brand isn't a solitary practice. Your marketing colleagues, the sales team, operations and just about everyone else should be familiar with the brand foundations you've created—remember that elevator pitch? To ensure that all these groups are communicating these brand messages in a consistent way, create brand guidelines that detail the voice and tone of your brand for each audience you speak to. Otherwise, you run the risk of stumbling into a sales deck created by some well-intentioned rogue that leaves you horrified at how he's describing the company.

Your brand guidelines act as guardrails for your company so that it looks, feels and sounds the same no matter who's talking about it. In your guidelines, you might include words and phrases you frequently use, or those that you absolutely should not. Products, services and descriptions ensure everyone talks the same way about a product across the organization.

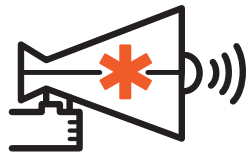


Website

This might be an understatement, but your website is vitally important to your business. Armed with the foundational elements of your brand, you should translate it to the web first. That might mean rewriting just a few pages; it could mean rethinking your entire site architecture. The result should be an audience-focused website that incorporates messaging from your brand story, WYSF and even values. Your culture should shine through your site.

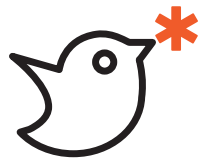
Blogs and Thought Leadership

Audience-focused blogs, articles and thought leadership can help you attract new customers, shorten your sales cycle and tighten the connection between your brand and your customers. This is where a lot of that trust-building comes in. A blog is the perfect place to tell your story, highlight the problems your audience faces and how your brand can solve them.



Sales Collateral

Brochures and sell sheets should be rich with details, but they still need to tell part of your brand story. Rethink your collateral suite in terms of your newly distinguished brand story to identify which changes to make.



Social Media

Being on social media is almost as important as having a modern website. Though people's trust in what they read on social media is at an all-time low, being present where your audience is lends credibility to your brand.

So please, spread your story across social media platforms. But ask yourself if where you're focusing your time makes sense. For example, if you're a B2B tech company, you probably won't make much of an impact on Snapchat. LinkedIn is the place you need to be. Know your audience before you commit to every social media channel.



Email

While we just said that social media is important, we're firm believers in not building on rented land. That is to say, don't build your marketing program relying on the benevolence of some third party. In the long run, connecting with your prospects and customers through email is more important than social media. When you can communicate with your customers and prospects by email, you're not at the whim of a social media platform's ever-changing algorithm.



It's Time for Action

The customer is in total control of the buying process these days. There are myriad choices for just about any type of product or service, and the buyer's journey is completely self-directed. Your customers search online, check out social channels and websites before they ever even contact you. That's why it's so important to create a strong brand story and tell it consistently across channels.

Of course, doing all of this important work on your own can be a challenge. Getting an outsider's perspective on what you do and how you can create a brand story about your company can help you create a strong, lasting brand. Scribewise can help you build your brand from the ground up, and then develop ongoing communications to implement and make your brand flourish.

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