



FREE GUIDE · BRANDING

LOGO

LOOK

VOICE

THE TRUE THING

The Brand Playbook

Why most branding starts at the wrong end, how to find the one true thing only your business can claim, and how to build everything else on top of it.

FOR

Owners of businesses that already exist

TIME TO READ

12 minutes

FROM

buildwithbina.com

A logo is the **last** thing

Your brand is the answer a customer gives when someone asks them why they chose you. Everything else — the logo, the colours, the type, the photography — is just how that answer gets carried around.

Which is why rebrands fail. A business that can't answer the question buys a new logo, and six months later nothing has changed, because the logo was never the problem.

Work in this order and each layer has something to stand on:

The true thing: the operational fact that makes you different. Already inside the business.

FOUND

Position: who it's for, and the one sentence that says why you.

DECIDED

Voice: how that sentence sounds everywhere you write.

WRITTEN

Identity: logo, colour, type. The clothes, not the person.

DESIGNED

Most businesses do this backwards and wonder why the new look didn't sell anything.

STEP ONE

Pick the arena before you fight

Most owners name their competitors wrong. They name the biggest companies in the category, or whoever is cheapest. Neither is who they actually lose work to.

YOUR REAL COMPETITOR IS WHOEVER THE CUSTOMER WAS ALSO CONSIDERING

The only way to know is to ask. Every customer who bought from you in the last six months, one question:

ASK THIS

"Before you picked us, who else were you looking at?"

NOT THIS

"Who do you think our competitors are?"

Ten answers will give you your real arena, and it is usually three or four names you weren't tracking. Sometimes the honest answer is "doing nothing" or "my brother-in-law" — write those down too. They're the hardest competitors you have.

The afternoon competitor study

Take the four names from step one. For each, write down only what you can see. No opinions, no guesses.

01 Their one sentence

Copy the headline off their homepage, word for word. Not what you think they mean — what it literally says.

02 What they promise

Speed, price, quality, care, scale? Most categories only have four or five promises in circulation.

03 What they prove

Numbers, names, photos, reviews, certifications. Anything a buyer could check.

04 How they look

Colour, type, photography. Three words for the feeling.

05 What they never mention

The most useful column. Gaps are where positions live.

Put it in a five-column table. The pattern shows up fast, and it's almost always the same: everyone promising the same thing in slightly different fonts.



THE CENTRE OF THIS GUIDE

The one true thing

If you only take one idea from this playbook, take this one. It's the difference between a brand people believe and a brand people scroll past — and you don't have to invent it, because it is already sitting inside your business.

05-07

Find it, test it, say it

STEP THREE

Find the thing only you can say

Every category runs on the same generic promises. *Quality workmanship. Customer-focused. No job too big or small.* They're invisible, because every competitor says them and no customer believes any of them.

Underneath those promises there is usually one operational fact that makes yours true — and most owners don't think it's worth mentioning, because to them it's just how the business runs.

TWO REAL EXAMPLES

A renovations company makes its own cabinetry in its own workshop. Every competitor in the city outsources it to a third party.

HELD
TIMELINES

A property staging company owns its furniture. Every competitor hires theirs in from wholesalers.

CAN COMMIT
TO A DATE

A coffee roaster roasts on Thursday and will not ship anything roasted the week before.

FRESHNESS
YOU CAN DATE

None of them was advertising the fact. All three thought it was boring. In each case it was the only thing on the website a competitor couldn't copy by Friday.

WHY OWNERS MISS IT

You've lived with the business for years, so the thing that makes it unusual has stopped looking unusual. The fastest way through that is to ask someone who has just joined, or a customer who has used a competitor. They'll name it in a sentence.

How to find yours

It's hiding in the parts of the business you take for granted. Work through these five questions and write the answers down even when they feel too obvious to count.

- 01 **What do you do in-house that others buy in?** Manufacturing, installation, delivery, support, design.
- 02 **What do you own that others rent?** Equipment, stock, vehicles, premises, the recipe.
- 03 **What do you refuse to do?** The jobs you turn down say more than the ones you take.
- 04 **What takes you longer than everyone else, on purpose?** Slowness you've chosen is a quality claim with evidence attached.
- 05 **What does a customer always say when they see it?** The same sentence, from stranger after stranger. That's the brand telling you what it is.

WORKED EXAMPLE

A small bakery answered question three with "we won't do custom cakes". It sounded like a weakness. It meant every oven ran one product line all morning, which is why their sourdough is out by six when the supermarket's is out by ten. **"Bread before dawn, because we don't make anything else"** came straight out of a refusal.

Then apply the test on the next page. Most answers won't survive it. The one that does is your brand.

The two-question test

Run every candidate through both. A claim has to pass both to be worth building on.

1 • Could a competitor say it by Friday?

If yes, it isn't a position, it's a slogan. "Passionate about quality" takes a competitor four seconds to copy. "We make it in our own workshop" takes them a factory.

2 • Could a customer check it?

If nobody can verify it, nobody will believe it. A claim that can be photographed, counted, visited or named is worth ten that can't.

AND ONE RULE ABOUT HOW YOU WRITE IT

Say what is true in the positive, about the thing in front of you. **Never write a negative absolute.** "We never buy in parts" dies the first time one client supplies their own. "If we supply it, we made it" survives, says the same thing, and can't be broken by a single exception.

STEP FIVE

One sentence

Now compress it. One sentence that a stranger understands in five seconds, with nothing in it you can't prove.

THE FRAME

We help **[who, specifically]** get **[the outcome they want]**, because **[the true thing]**.

The "because" is what most positioning statements are missing, and it's the only part a competitor can't lift.

WEAK

"Premium renovations with a focus on quality and customer service."

STRONG

"Kitchens that land on the promised date, because we build the cabinetry ourselves."

Write ten. Read them aloud. Keep the one that doesn't make you cringe.

Voice is a list of bans

Most voice guides are useless because they're adjectives. "Friendly, professional, approachable" tells a writer nothing.

A voice becomes real when it's a list of things you don't do. Bans are checkable; adjectives aren't.

We don't use exclamation marks.

CHECKABLE

We never say "passionate", "bespoke" or "solutions".

CHECKABLE

We don't claim a number we can't screenshot.

CHECKABLE

We're approachable but professional.

USELESS

Then three words you always use. These are almost never the industry words — they're the ones your customers reach for.

THEY SAY

"the bench", "the fit-out", "my bloke"

YOU WERE WRITING

"benchtop solutions", "project delivery", "account manager"

Five bans and three always-words fit on a sticky note, and anyone you hire can follow them. That is the whole deliverable.

Now, and only now, the look

With a position and a voice decided, the visual work stops being taste and starts being translation. You're not asking "do I like it" — you're asking "does this carry the sentence".

01 Colour before logo

Pick a palette the category isn't using. Three colours, one accent used sparingly. If every competitor is blue, don't be blue.

02 Two typefaces, maximum

One for headings with character, one for body that disappears. A third is almost always a mistake.

03 Photography is the brand

People see your photos far more than your logo. Bad photos on a good logo still reads as cheap.

04 Then the logo

It must work at 40 pixels and in one colour. Test it as a profile picture before you fall in love with it.

Written down, or it isn't real

A brand that only lives in the owner's head stops being consistent the moment a second person touches it — a designer, a VA, a printer, an agency.

One page is enough. If it doesn't fit on one page, nobody will use it.

- 01 **The sentence.** Your position, as written in step five.
- 02 **The true thing,** with the safe wording, and what you must never claim.
- 03 **Colours,** as hex codes, with which one is the accent.
- 04 **Typefaces,** with where each one is used.
- 05 **Voice:** five bans, three words you always use.
- 06 **Logo files,** and the one rule for clear space around it.

Then make everything match: website, Instagram, invoices, van, email signature, the sign on the door. Consistency is most of what people mean when they call a brand "professional".

The ten-point brand check

Answer honestly. Any "no" is cheaper to fix now than after you've printed it on something.

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- 01 Can you name the four businesses you actually lose work to?
 - 02 Have you asked a real customer who else they considered?
 - 03 Can you name one operational fact a competitor couldn't copy this week?
 - 04 Could a customer verify it without taking your word for it?
 - 05 Is your position one sentence, with a "because" in it?
 - 06 Does your homepage headline say that sentence, or something vaguer?
 - 07 Do you have five written bans for how you write?
 - 08 Does your logo still read at profile-picture size?
 - 09 Do your photos look as good as your product actually is?
 - 10 Does it all match — site, socials, invoices, signage?

Seven or more yes: you have a brand, it just needs tightening. **Four to six:** the pieces exist but they're pulling in different directions. **Three or fewer:** start at step one, and don't buy a logo yet.

Foundation before facade

Branding goes wrong when it starts with the visible part. The logo, the palette and the photography are real work and they matter — but they're carrying something, and if there's nothing underneath them they're just decoration on a business that still can't say why it's different.

The good news is you don't have to invent the difference. It's almost always already there, in the way you actually run the place, written off as too ordinary to mention.

Find that. Say it in a sentence a customer can check. Then dress it properly.

THE EIGHT STEPS, IN ORDER

Ask ten customers who else they considered

ARENA

Five columns on four real competitors

STUDY

Five questions about how you actually run

THE TRUE THING

Could they copy it by Friday? Could a customer check it?

TEST

One sentence, with a "because" in it

POSITION

Five bans, three always-words

VOICE

Colour, type, photography, then the logo

IDENTITY

One page, and make everything match it

SYSTEM



If you'd rather not do it alone

BINA builds the foundation — the arena, the position, the identity, the website and the content that c

START HERE

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