No introduction needed: How iconic brands are born and why they thrive

Category: Branding
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There are countless types of brand in the world today.

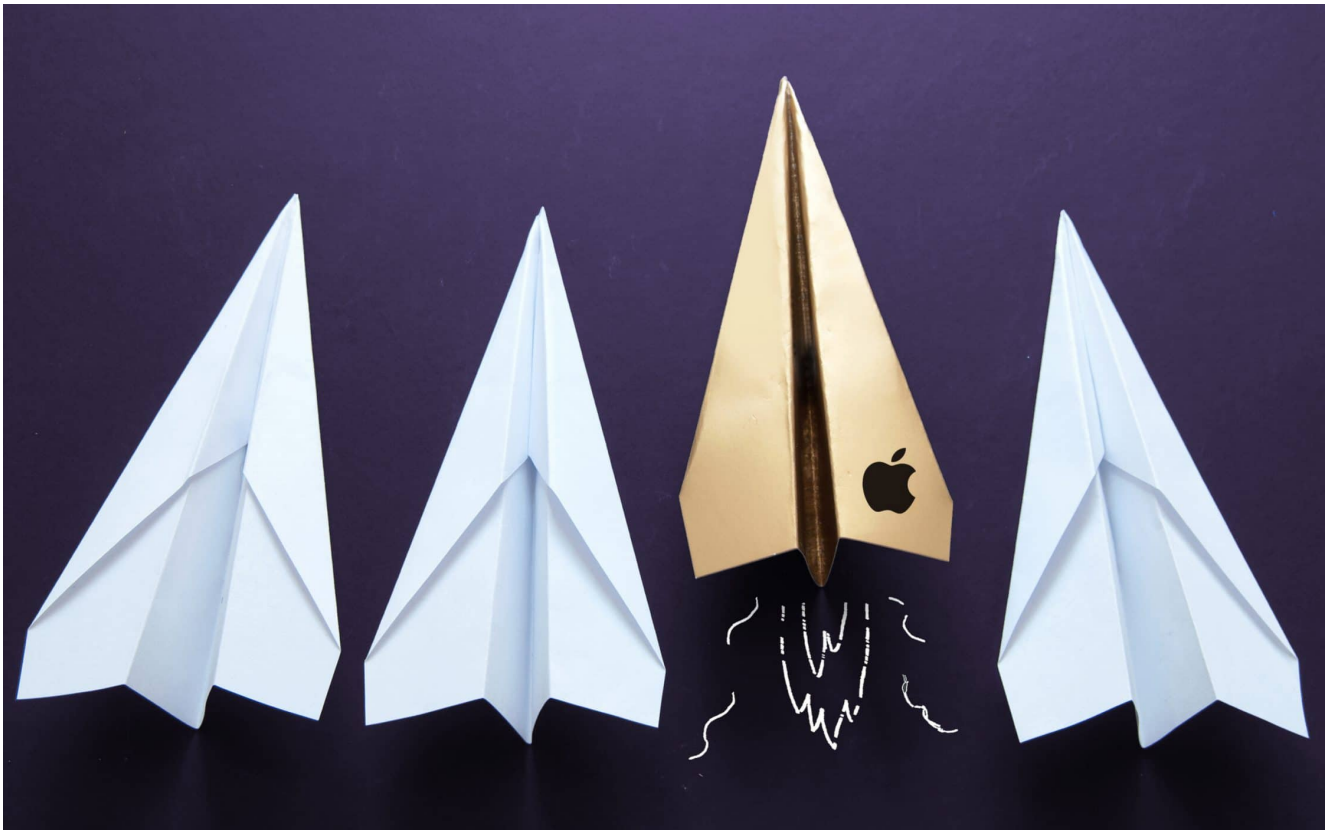
However, while there are millions of successful brands, and thousands of dominant brands, there are only a handful of truly iconic brands.

In the business world, we use the term “iconic” when referring to a company that pulls out all the stops. These are the organisations that are instantly recognisable on a global scale, and easy to pinpoint with nothing but a splash of colour or a logo.

Iconic brands are cultural phenomena that inspire unbreakable loyalty in their fans. Greater than its products or services, an iconic brand identity has such a strong influence and reputation within an industry that it needs no introduction. In fact, most people can name several iconic brands, all the way from Apple and Nike, to Fairy and Coca-Cola.

The question is, how does a company take the next step, from successful company into an iconic brand? For most, the journey won’t be simple, but if the likes of Apple, Google, and Disney have anything to prove, it’s that almost any company can grow to icon status with the right help.

Here, we’re going to look at the anatomy of iconic brands, and what it takes to build a truly unforgettable, and corresponding, iconic brand identity.



Achieving icon status: What makes a brand iconic?

So, what are the ingredients of iconic brand identities?

Well, it depends on who you ask. According to the author of "How Brands Become Icons", Douglas Holt, brands are companies that are masters in storytelling. They know how to connect with their customers on a deeper level, representing a certain selection of cultural values through products, advertising, and even customer service.

People form strong bonds with iconic brands based on the company's purpose, and its ability to generate affinity with its target audience. For instance, Nike's customers purchase their products not because Nike is the only company that can offer sportswear on the market, or because their prices are particularly reasonable. Instead, when you purchase from Nike, you're buying into the idea that anyone, can accomplish anything thanks to the "Just do It" strapline.

Iconic brands are experts in psychological marketing. These are businesses that have spent years developing a unique identity that advocates ideas and concepts that resonate with the people that they want to sell to. Because iconic brand identities play an important role in their consumer's life, they enjoy a huge degree of brand loyalty – often beyond the likes that any other company can achieve.

While the features of iconic brands aren't necessarily set in stone, most experts agree that the following elements set these companies apart from even the biggest alternate competitors:

- **Their strong cultural roots:** Iconic brands tap into the values of society. Their stories, purpose, and values reflect the beliefs and concerns of their target audience, making it easier for them to connect with even the most complex customers.
- **Their image and identity:** Even in today'sdigitally diverse world, iconic brand identities prevail because they're consistent, powerful, and easy-to-recognise. For instance, Nike is named after the goddess of victory from Greek mythology, because the company tells a story of products that can lift any athlete to new heights. The Nike logo highlights that concept by representing the spirit of the winged deity that inspired the business name.
- **Their compelling story:** No matter what happens, iconic brands remain true to their story and values, even if that means reinterpreting their beliefs at times to suit an ever-changing environment. Iconic brands are true to their customers, and themselves.

The intrinsic elements of iconic

brands

Iconic brands are valuable.

While it's exciting to think that everyone in your target audience knows your company name, there's a lot more to achieving icon status than just the benefit of recognition. In fact, many experts suggest that iconic brands have advantages that help them to stay ahead of the competition – regardless of which new products and features other companies might introduce.

It's no surprise that all entrepreneurs want their brand to become iconic. Achieving an iconic brand identity means that your company becomes more than just a convenient option to your customer – but an essential part of your target audience's lifestyle and identity. The question is, how do you begin to build an icon?

1. Be the one and only

No matter how innovative or creative you might be, it's hard to think of a USP that no-one has ever considered before. Even if you manage to create something completely new, there's a good chance that someone will end up building on your concept to develop their own product. However, just because you might not be the only person selling your item or service, doesn't mean you can't be one-of-a-kind.

All organisations, no matter how big or small, can revolutionise their industry by doing something that none of their competitors have done before. Be bold and imaginative, and don't be afraid to try something new. Today's customers love companies that have the courage to lead the way.

2. Concentrate on the people (not the

product)

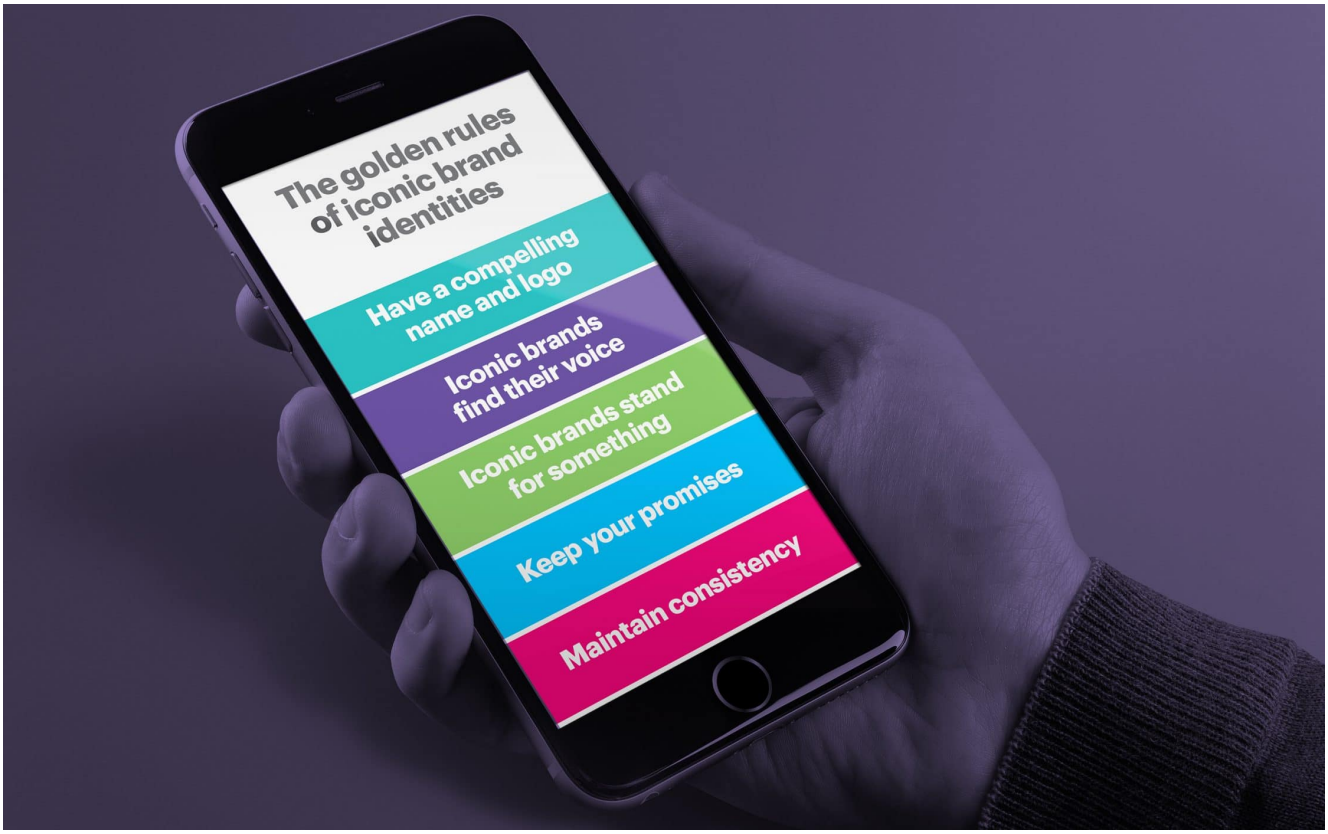
When you desperately want to make a profit and keep your company running smoothly, it's easy to overlook the fact that you're there to serve your customers, not the other way around. Think about your user personas, and look for ways to use your marketing materials to emphasise how your service or product will make people's lives better, or solve a specific problem.

While it's tempting to just list the technical specs of your new item, remember that your customers care about how your product is going to fit seamlessly into their lives and make their day-to-day challenges easier.

3. Generate influence early

To become an iconic brand, you first need to be a successful and dominant company. This means creating authority for your organisation. There are plenty of ways you can do this. For instance, writing powerful articles about your industry that help people to better understand the marketplace you exist within can be very useful.

One of the best ways to start generating influence for your business as quickly as possible is to reach out to influential figures on social media. Start to create a list of people who could have a significant impact on your brand reach as early as possible, and connect with them before you even launch your first product. If you can convince people to start talking about your company months before it even launches, you can build a foundation of interest that helps to skyrocket your brand into iconic status.



The golden rules of iconic brand identities

If you want an iconic brand, then you need an iconic brand identity.

Remember, there's more to your company than its name and logo. The people who connect with your business want to resonate with the personalities behind your brand, not the product or service you offer. Since iconic brands are all about telling stories, it's important to think carefully about how each aspect of your identity contributes to the narrative you want to create.

Think of iconic companies like Coca-Cola, for instance, everything from their impeccable red colouring, to their unique typography speaks to the fun and familiar nature of the brand. What's more, regardless of whether the company is appearing in print, online, or on TV, their identity remains the same.

If you want to replicate the same experience with your own company, then you need to develop the following things:

1. Iconic brands have a compelling name and logo

There's more to a brand than the visual impact your company has on the world, but it's safe to say that all iconic brand identities benefit from being instantly recognisable. Brand recognition begins with the name you choose for your business – a title that will appear on everything from your websites and social networks, to your marketing materials, merchandise and products. The more memorable your name is, the easier it will be for people to develop a connection with your brand.

What's more, it's not enough to just have a great name. People generally associate brands with their logo. For instance, Nike doesn't need to print its name on its products to earn awareness today – their customers know them by their memorable swoosh. Think about how your logo can help to connect the threads of your brand story and give your business an extra layer of authority.

2. Iconic brands find their voice

Once you've perfected your visual identity, you'll need to start thinking about your personality in terms of what you say and how you say it. The tone of voice you choose for your organisation can have a huge impact on whether you can become an iconic brand identity or not.

Your organisation's voice is the language your employees and team members use to deliver a unified message to your customers across countless communication touch-points. The most successful businesses know how to spend time cultivating a powerful voice. Think about the brands you admire and what makes them unique. Consider the way they connect with you through social media and email, and what you enjoy about their

voice. For instance, Brewdog has a distinctly "punk rock" tone to their voice.

3. Iconic brands stand for something

Take a moment to consider some of the brands you love most. Those companies will generally stand for (or against) something that matters to you. For instance, Pashley is a particularly unique company because it stands true to its vintage heritage despite changes in the trends of the day.

Usually, the best brand purposes are the ones that connect with corporate responsibility in some way. Think about how your values as a company can contribute to delivering a better world for people to live in, through ethical and moral practices.

4. Keep your promises

When you create a new brand, come up with a purpose, and share your values with the world, you also make a promise to your customers about what you're going to achieve, and how you're going to accomplish your goals. While staying true to your word might seem like common sense, you'd be surprised how many companies end up losing the support of their customers because they fail to keep their promises.

Remember, happy and engaged customers who like your business are the best source of referrals. Zappos has built fantastic credibility with their customers over the years by promising them quick overnight shipping – a practice that has helped them to earn huge amounts of loyalty.

5. Maintain consistency

Finally, building iconic brands takes time. Sometimes, it's tempting to change your messaging and your image depending on the trends in your marketplace and the needs of an evolving

audience. However, this simply leads to confusion among your customers, and a lack of familiarity which makes it far more difficult to establish an iconic brand.

Iconic brand identities are consistent, no matter where your company interacts with your customer. Whether you're reaching out over social media, speaking to clients on the phone, or sending out an email, the distinctive parts of your personality should always shine through. Consistency creates familiarity, familiarity breeds trust, and trust leads to iconic brands.



Iconic brands connect with their customers

By this point, you should be well aware that iconic brands aren't built by accident.

Creating an iconic brand identity means finding the perfect combination of colour scheme, logo design, strapline, and

personality and bringing it all together in a way that conveys your ultimate brand promise.

While there's no one-size-fits-all solution to designing the perfect memorable brand, it's worth noting that some of the most iconic identities in the world have achieved their cult-like status thanks to the relationship they build with their customers. With that in mind, here are a few tips for making those all-important connections.

1. It all starts with research

While most of us had hoped to leave our homework behind with school, the moment you decide to start your own business, you're agreeing to do a boat-load of research. Customers are the lifeblood of your brand, and you need to understand what they want from your company if you have any hope of keeping them engaged.

Before you begin thinking about things like logos and website design, make sure that you have a strong user persona in place that can guide you all the way from your visual identity choices, to your decisions regarding personality and voice. Usually, competitive analysis and market research is the first step in any important branding decision – particularly if you want to create a company that stands the test of time.

2. Be social!

In today's digitally-connected environment, it's easier than ever for companies to establish lasting connections with their target audience through social media campaigns. Many of the best and most iconic brands in the world spend a huge amount of money on their social media efforts, in an attempt to cultivate strong communities of happy and satisfied customers.

The more you can build relationships with your audience through videos, social posts, and images, the more likely you

are to establish brand advocates within your network. This means that you'll be able to start breaking into the value that word of mouth marketing can offer. Since 74% of customers say that word of mouth is the ultimate influencer for their buying decisions, it makes sense to start getting social.

3. Provide the value your customers want

When it comes to creating iconic brands, a lot of companies get caught up focusing on just one part of the marketing mix "price". Earning the attention of your audience means knowing how to provide the value your customers have been searching for – but there's more to value than just money. You can also focus on things like:

- Product leadership (having the most innovative product on the market).
- Operational excellence (having the most affordable products).
- Great customer service (being efficient, professional and personable).

Think about what kind of value your product or service can offer and how it sets you apart from your competitors. Remember, you're going to need the differentiator you choose to stand the test of time. In this case, iconic brands rarely go for low-cost as a USP.

4. Be reliable

Finally, iconic brands are trustworthy. If your end goal is to be an iconic brand with an iconic brand identity, then you need to establish loyal clients, and that means keeping your customers happy – whatever it takes. To be reliable in today's business world, you need to make sure that you're not making any promises you can't keep, and that you're jumping through any hoops necessary to keep your followers on your side.

A brand accomplishes nothing without the support of loyal customers. Make delighting your followers one of the biggest goals that your company has set for itself, and you'll find that it's far easier to develop an iconic brand.

The more you connect with your customers, the easier it will be to define an iconic brand story that resonates with your target audience.

Image is everything: Tips for iconic brand logos

No discussion of iconic companies would be complete without a brief Segway into the image that makes memorable companies so recognisable: iconic brand logos. Your logo is the illustration of your iconic brand's story. In other words, it helps to convey what you want to represent in one simple and easy-to-digest graphic.

While visual identity has always been a central focus in the world of marketing when you're building an iconic brand identity, you can't afford to miss out on the power that a truly incredible logo can bring.

Whether you choose a single shape, a unique typography, or something else entirely, the logo you select should be something that can stay with your brand for decades, as you make that all-important journey from successful business into an iconic brand. With that in mind, consider the following tips:

1. Keep it simple (stupid)

Logo design can be one of the most exciting parts of rolling out a new brand, but that doesn't mean that you should get carried away trying to implement countless pictures and shapes into your graphic. A simple approach generally makes for a

more versatile logo that can be used across a range of media, from tiny website icons to huge storefront signs.

Think about the most iconic brand logos for a moment, from McDonalds to FedEx. None of these images are complex or busy, they're all simple, and recognisable. After all, simplicity also makes a logo easier to remember. A good logo is one that your fans should be able to draw from memory.

2. Make it relevant

It doesn't matter how stunning your logo is, if it isn't right for the business it represents. Pink is rarely a good colour to use for the logo of a "masculine" team, and bank logos need to use typography that helps them to appear strong and authoritative. If you're struggling to figure out which logos would be relevant to your company, you can always consider researching some of the competitors in your industry.

3. Be distinctive

Iconic brand logos are distinctive. This means that regardless of where they appear, they have the potential to stand out from the competition. While it's useful to get some inspiration from your competitors if you're struggling with your logo design, it's also important to remember that there needs to be something unique about the imagery you choose that makes it as recognisable and memorable as possible.

Just keep in mind that your distinctive factors shouldn't come at the costs of scalability or simplicity. While you'll need to find a way to make your organisation stand out, it's also important to consider your needs in the long term, and ask yourself whether your logo will continue to perform well in the future.



From idea to icon: Creating iconic brands

Ultimately, the right collection of features and elements can help you to create a successful brand, but it takes something special to make your identity truly iconic. While your name, logo, and even your website design can all contribute to giving you authority in your target space, you'll need to think about how you can bring all of the elements of a sustainable brand together in a captivating way if you want to transform an idea into an icon.

Iconic brands achieve their status because they carefully adapt their visual and verbal identity to tell their customers a unique story, then they commit themselves to that story over the years and decades ahead. Iconic branding takes time and consistency. The most iconic brand identities find a way to seep into every aspect of a user's life – becoming embedded in their sense of culture.

Each of the tips and suggestions made above is only the starting points involved with creating an iconic brand. Measurable success occurs when you can maintain those practices over an extended period of time, showing your commitment to purposes, values, and identities that make your company narrative unforgettable.

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