What is a brand book and why does your business need one?

Category: Branding
written by Stewart Hodgson | 14 April 2023
What is a brand book, and why is it vital to your company? You might have encountered the term “brand book” before when reading marketing blogs or speaking to brand strategists. Essentially, this document acts as a crucial tool and roadmap for portraying and building your brand.

While many factors make up an effective brand, few things are more important than consistency. Brands help companies create an emotional connection with their target audience.

They’re designed carefully to evoke certain thoughts and feelings, paving the way for loyalty, affinity, and growth. If your company has a different voice or image on every platform, this dilutes the impact you can have, causing confusion and distrust.

Brand books ensure everyone working for or with your brand understands exactly what message you’re trying to send.

They provide step-by-step guidelines on everything from your tone of voice to your color palette, logo, iconography, and more. Sometimes, they’re called “brand bibles” – documents meant to guide, inspire, and direct your team.

Today, we will cover everything you need to know about building an effective brand book, why it’s so important, and how to avoid making simple mistakes.



Brand book definition: What is a brand book?

Let’s start with the basics: what is a brand book?

Otherwise known as a brand guide, brand bible, or brand directions, a brand book is an outline of all of the core elements of your identity. Essentially, it’s a recipe outlining all of the ingredients that make up your unique business, from your core values to your image, mission, and voice.

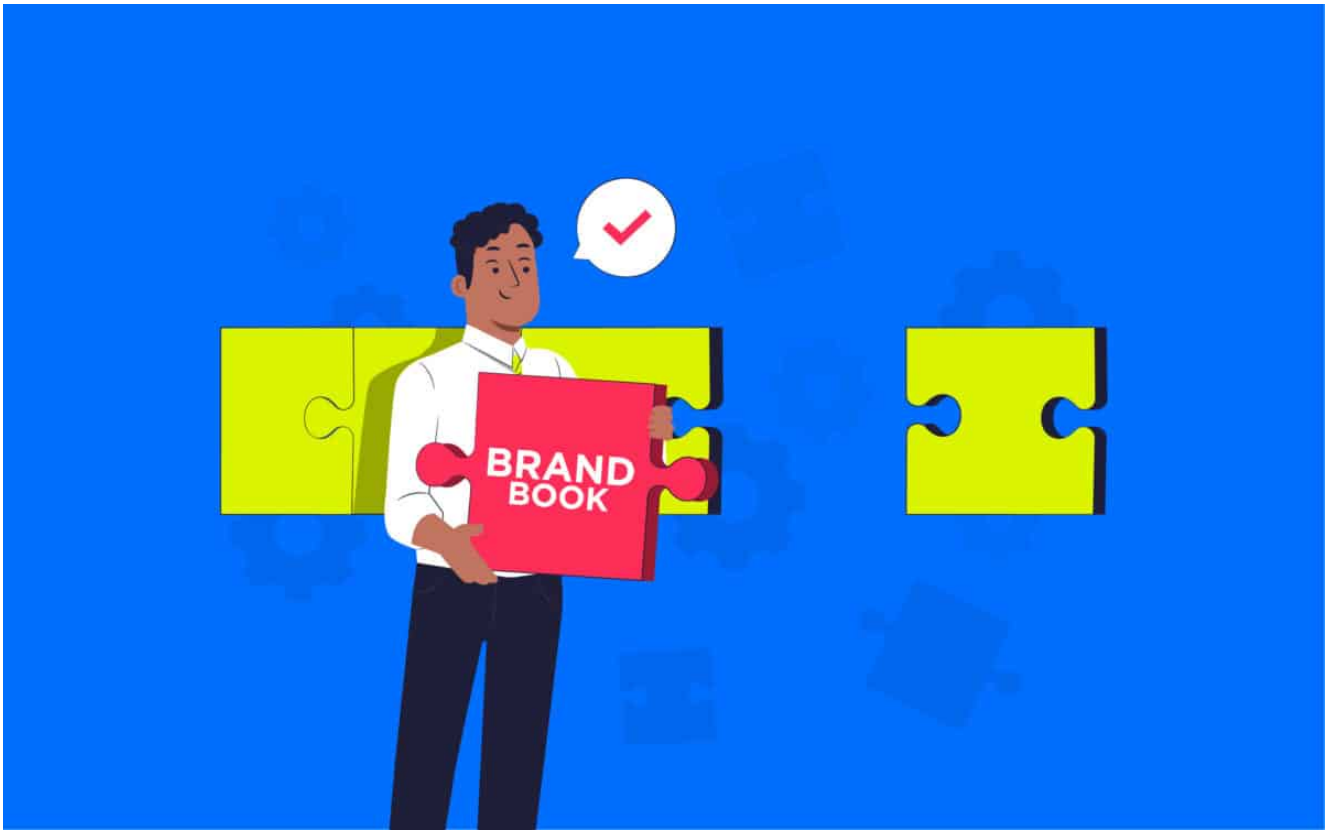
Brand books are DNA blueprints designed to show employees, contractors, and even customers exactly what your business is and how it should be portrayed. Many of the world’s biggest brands, from Google and Apple to Coca-Cola, have their own brand books.

One core thing to keep in mind is that a brand book and a style guide aren’t exactly the same things. Style guides are

often used as a component of a brand book. They help people inside and outside of your organization understand how to use and create your visual assets.

A brand book, on the other hand, looks at all of the components making up your brand.

There are tips on how to use your visual assets coherently, but brand books also cover the core focus or essence of your brand, looking at meaning, vision, values, and tone of voice.



Why do you need a brand book?

The core reason any business benefits from a brand book is simple: consistency.

Ask a brand strategist, “why do you need a brand book” and they’ll tell you consistency is key to developing a familiar, engaging, and emotional brand identity. The more consistent you are with how you showcase your brand’s image, voice, and values, the more trustworthy you become.

Customers struggle to build relationships with businesses that appear to constantly change their brand with new color palettes, disjointed logos, or unpredictable messaging.

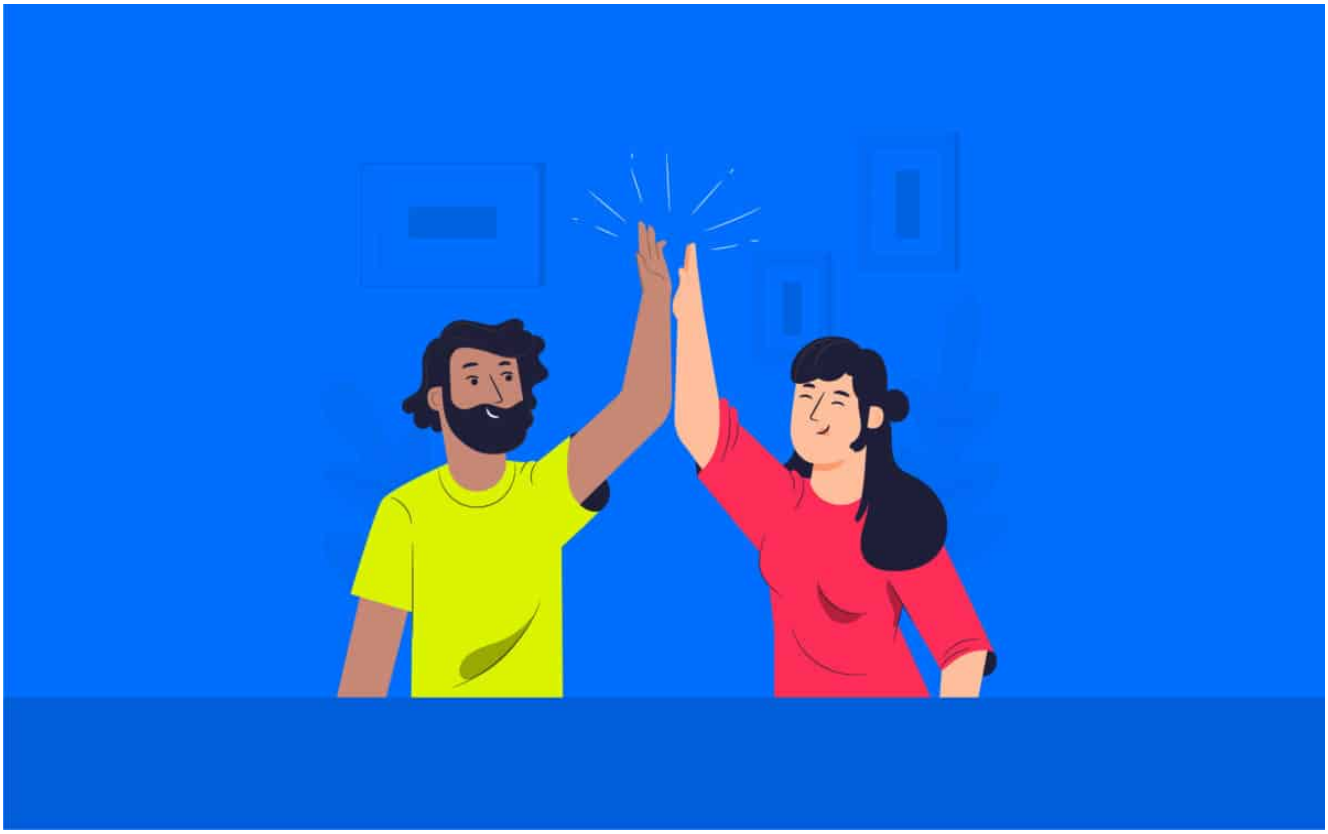
Unfortunately, as your business grows and you expand into new avenues for marketing and promotion, you'll often find it becomes a lot more difficult to maintain consistency.

When adapting to different environments, from social media to offline marketing, slight changes can emerge in how you present your brand, causing inconsistencies.

At the same time, brand books help to keep everyone on the same page as your business begins to expand with new employees and outside parties. They ensure every team member knows how to convey the elements of your brand correctly.

Brand books are also a useful resource to give to your branding experts, marketing teams, and contractors who work alongside your brand for promotional purposes. In some cases, brand books can even help you to strengthen your relationship with your customers.

Many major brands publish their brand books online to show their customers exactly what their mission, vision, and values are.



What is the purpose of a brand book?

One easy answer to the question, “What is a brand book” is a set of guidelines designed to keep your brand consistent and coherent across multiple channels and campaigns. The purpose of a brand book is to be an all-in-one blueprint of what your brand stands for and how it’s portrayed.

Used correctly, your brand book will help you to:

Maintain consistency

As mentioned above, one of the primary reasons to create a brand book is to ensure a consistent image and identity for your audience.

Your brand book ensures everything from your tone of voice to your image remains the same, no matter how much your business grows or how far you expand across different channels.

Define brand assets

When building a brand book, you'll have an opportunity to define crucial components of your brand in great detail.

You'll determine what kind of fonts should be used in advertising campaigns, outline your color palette, and even determine how you're going to reach your audience across different channels.

Preserves brand quality

A brand book helps your company to maintain its brand value by providing insights into best practices and things to avoid. It shows customers and contractors how to minimize the risk of diluting or damaging your brand.

This can ensure you're less likely to encounter issues with your brand's reputation.

Strengthen team spirit

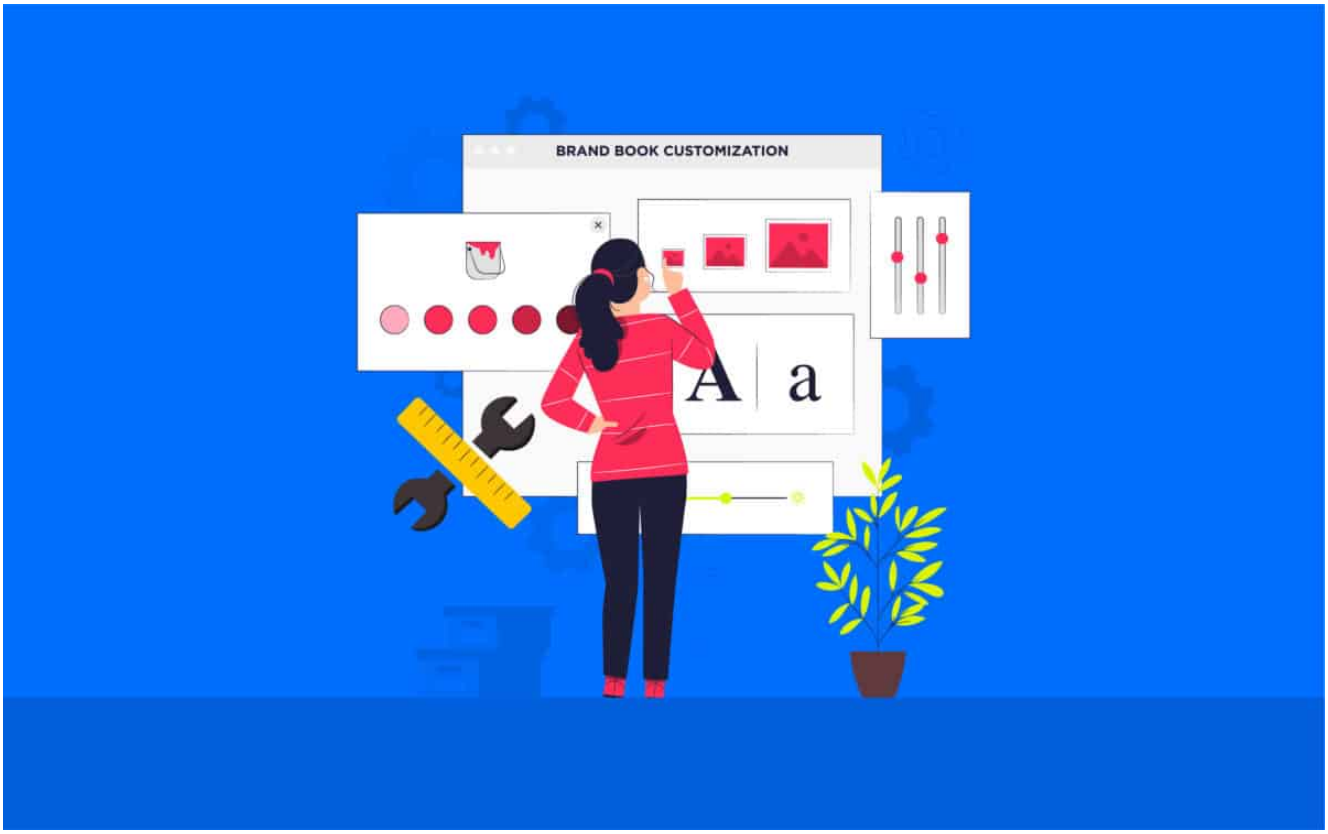
Getting everyone on the same page about your brand's vision and mission doesn't just help to improve your relationship with customers. Clear guidelines can also keep your internal team members on the same page and give them a sense of purpose.

In some cases, it can help to improve employee engagement.

Guide campaigns

Many companies use brand books as crucial roadmaps when working with both internal and external experts on marketing campaigns. It essentially acts as a compass to ensure you're pushing your business in the right direction and toward the correct audience.

You may even end up with a better ROI for your promotions.



What is included in a brand book?

In some cases, the exact components of a brand book can change depending on the nature of the business. For the most part, a brand book is intended to be a relatively comprehensive document outlining every aspect of a company’s identity and how it should be represented.

Some companies add extra components to their brand books, such as specific guidelines for how to showcase brand elements on different social media channels. Other organizations may simply provide broad guidelines about the tone of voice, image, and brand vision.

The best brand books ensure everyone working with or inside of your business will have a clear view of what your business is, what your brand consists of, and how you should be portrayed.

Some of the core components of a brand book may include:

Visual identity

Logos, colors, fonts, icons, images, and anything else used to portray your brand from a visual perspective.

Editorial identity

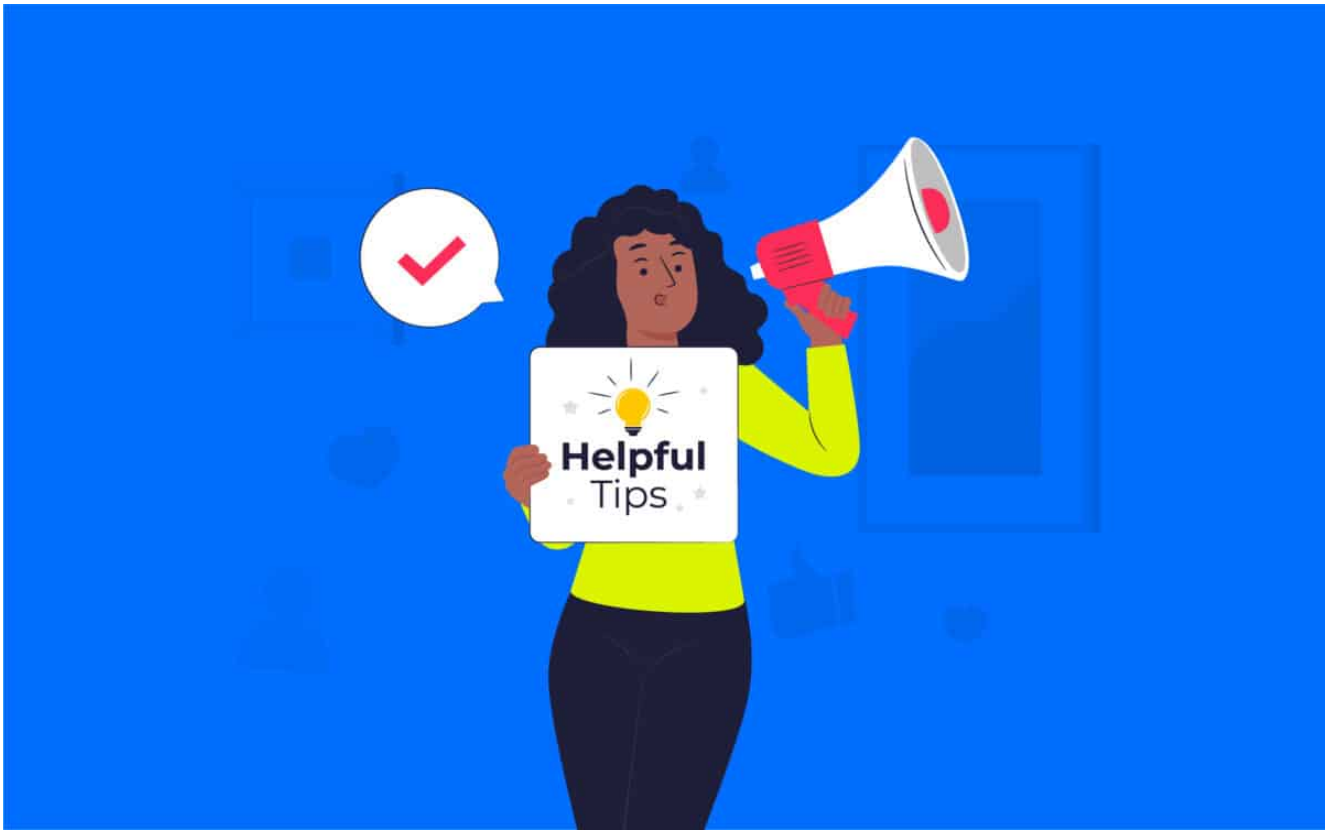
Your tone of voice, keywords you tend to use in campaigns, communication styles and formats, and marketing guidelines.

Brand identity

An overall view of your brand’s mission statement, history, values, purpose, vision, and anything else which might be relevant.

Brand books can also include “dos and don’ts” for how to use different brand assets, as well as insights into useful information, like who your target audience might be.

Brand books are generally created primarily for in-house design, copywriting, and marketing teams, but they can also be used for associates, clients, media partners, and even to connect with the general public.



How do you structure a brand book? Top tips

When answering the question: “what is a brand book” most experts will tell you structure is crucial.

As you’ll see in the brand book examples below, there’s no one-size-fits-all method for producing an amazing brand book. Many brand books include a touch of the company’s personality throughout the pages.

They can be structured either as an all-in-one page or as a physical or digital book with multiple pages to browse through.

Some companies even create interactive brand books with the help of designers, with their own dedicated sections. Here are some top tips for structuring your brand book correctly:

Know your audience

To ensure your brand book hits home and has the right impact, it’s important to understand who you’re creating it for. Some companies will create different brand books for their employees and customers, highlighting different information.

Stay simple

Although a brand book can be quite comprehensive, it should also be easy to understand. Use simple words and phrases, examples, and graphics to ensure everyone who interacts with your brand book can understand the instructions it provides.

Make it attractive

While a brand book might not be a primary marketing asset, it should evoke the essence and spirit of your brand. Making your brand book as visually appealing as possible will make it more attractive to readers.

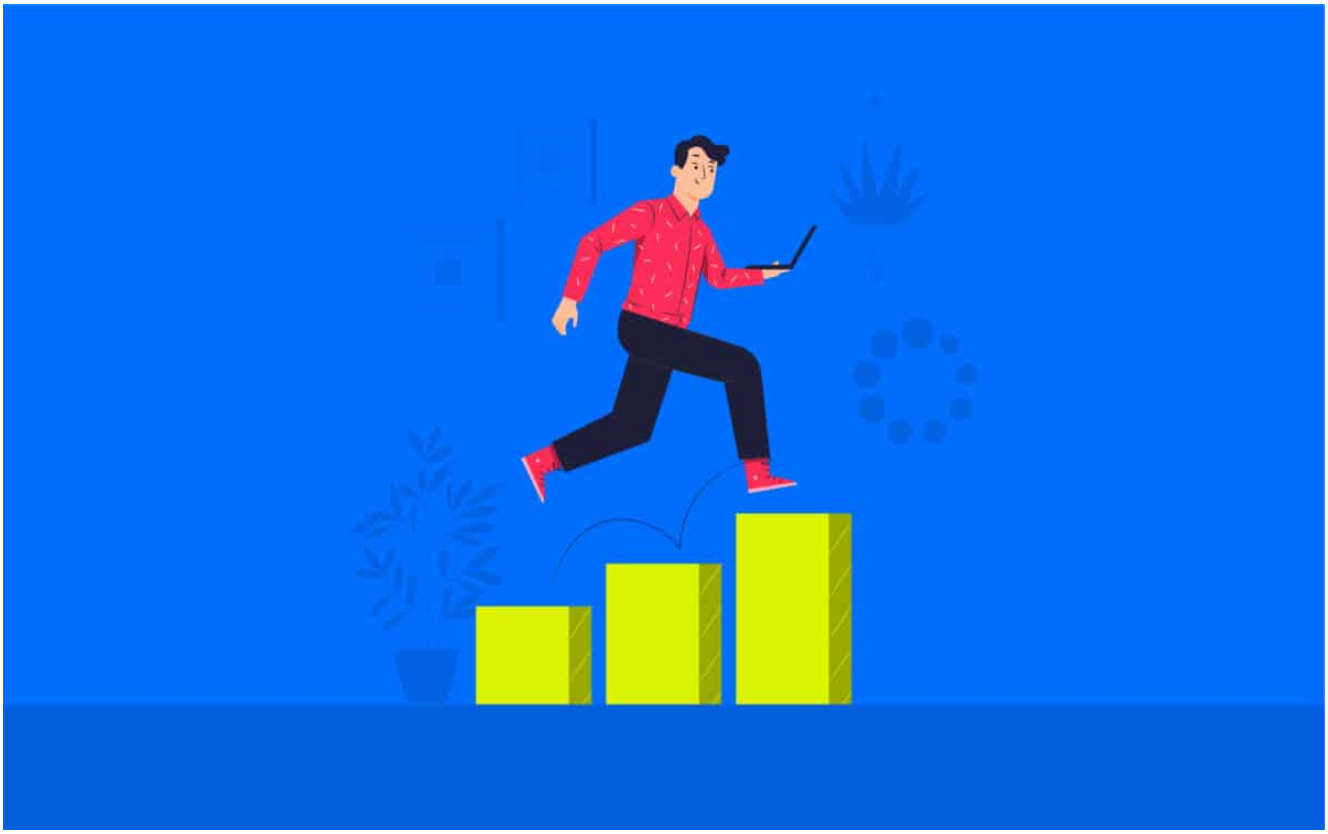
Provide value

A brand book isn’t just a collection of information about your brand; it’s an educational and informative guide. It needs to provide concrete information and instructions people can actually follow. Make it actionable, engaging, and comprehensive.

Make it easy to navigate

Brand books can end up getting relatively long, depending on the number of assets and brand components you need to convey. With this in mind, it’s worth ensuring it’s easy to navigate between different sections of your book.

It’s also worth noting that a brand book can be a relatively dynamic document. Most brands are constantly evolving and growing. As such, you may need to update your brand book to reflect the introduction of new marketing strategies, values, and concepts.



How to create a brand book: Step by step

Creating a brand book can be a relatively complex and time-consuming process, particularly if you don't have much design or branding experience yourself. As such, the easiest way to ensure your brand book is effective is to work with a professional team on its creation.

A branding agency like Fabrik will be able to work with you on producing a powerful brand asset.

However, whether you're going it alone or working with a professional team, there are a few key components you'll need to think about when you're designing your brand book.

Step 1: Introduce the core components of your brand

A brand book doesn't just introduce how to use your logos and

fonts. It tells people about the essence of your company, what your values are, and what you stand for. Generally, this means most brand books start with an introduction to the brand.

Outline what your company is and what it does. Share what the business is passionate about, what it hopes to achieve, and what makes it unique.

In the initial section of your brand book, an overview of your brand identity should include the following:

Your brand promise

What are you committing to do for your customers, your community, and the world in general? Make sure you're clear and realistic here. Avoid using jargon or cliches, and don't make your promise too hyperbolic.

Your vision

What's the direction your brand is heading in? What do you hope to accomplish with your products and services? What inspired you to create the company in the first place, and what is your strategy for reaching your goals?

Your mission

Why does your brand exist? Aside from making money, what inspired you to develop this company and the products and services it sells? Who is your target audience, and how are you going to serve them?

Your core values

What guides your company? How do you define success for your brand, and what's most important to consider when you're taking actions toward growth? For instance, do you value sustainability, quality, or customer care?

Your history

How did your brand begin? Who were the founders, and what challenges did you face in bringing your brand to life? Which competitors did you want to outshine when you brought your business to life? What inspired you?

Your products or services

What do you actually create in your brand? What are the unique selling points of your products and services? Outline their features, benefits, and their core purpose in helping you reach your goals.

Step 2: Develop your graphic charter

Once you've clearly outlined the core ethos of your brand, the next step is highlighting how it should be portrayed from a visual perspective. The goal here is to make sure everyone who works to promote your brand knows how to present your logo, colors, and other core visual assets.

Once again, there are numerous factors to consider here. If you need to provide your readers with extra context, providing visual examples can be extremely helpful. Make sure you cover the following:

Your logo

What does your logo represent, and what variants are available to use? What are the dimensions and proportions of each element?

How should the logo be positioned, and what are the core colors and components involved? How should people use your logo, and are there any instances wherein the use of your logo is banned?

Typography

Which fonts should be used in combination with your branding elements? When you're writing letters, producing banners, or creating assets for your website, what kind of typefaces do you expect people to use?

Color palette

What are the key colors connected to your brand? You can define how each color should be used in combination with other shades and outline any "alternative" colors used for different variations of logos.

Make sure you include the exact name and code of each color according to HEX guidelines or RGB.

Visuals

How should visual elements be used in the promotion of your brand? What kind of pictures, illustrations, photographs, and icons are appropriate to your company? Are there any core colors or styles which should always be used when producing icons and graphics?

Step 3: Build your editorial guidelines

Finally, it's time to outline how your business should speak to its target audience. Your editorial guidelines highlight exactly what kind of voice, language, and personality you want to convey whenever you're interacting with customers.

In your editorial guidelines, you'll outline terms, vocabulary, speech patterns, and marketing personas which resonate with your target audience.

Use your editorial guidelines to define:

Tone of voice

What kind of personality do you want to convey when you're

connecting with customers? What kind of thoughts and feelings are you hoping to be associated with? What style of language will you use (i.e., informal or formal)?

Key strategies and tactics

How do you plan on connecting with your target audience? What platforms and methodologies are you going to use to convey your brand voice? How do you expect people to behave when writing or speaking on behalf of your brand?

The editorial process

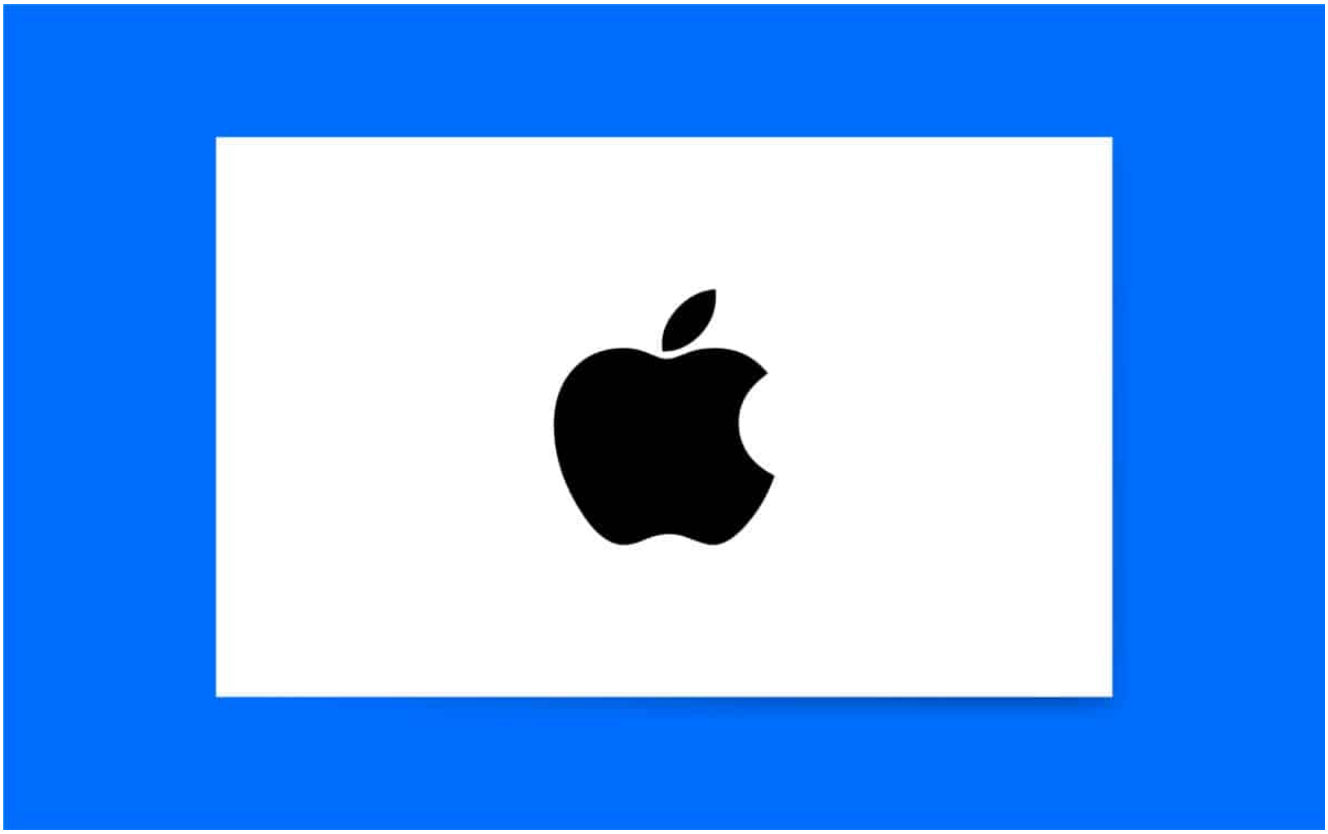
How do you prepare content to be shared with the public? Is content proofread and fact-checked before being published? How much freedom should people have when writing or speaking on behalf of your company?

It’s sometimes helpful to include concrete examples of your tone of voice and personality by sharing examples of social media posts, PowerPoint presentations, articles, emails, press releases, and so on.

Brand book examples: Inspiration for your brand book

If you’re still struggling with the question, “What is a brand book” it can be helpful to look at some examples of companies that have already produced their own. As mentioned above, many of the world’s biggest brands have produced their own brand books and guidelines.

Here are some great examples to inspire you.



Apple

Though relatively simple, Apple’s identity guidelines are a perfect representation of the company’s minimalistic style. The brand book highlights everything employees and contractors need to know about working with Apple and using its logo correctly.

There are plenty of excellent examples of how to use crucial assets, and the whole book is easy to navigate.

https://www.apple.com/legal/sales-support/certification/docs/logo_guidelines.pdf



Cisco

Cisco’s colorful brand book is an interactive document brimming with useful information about the company’s identity, vision, and values. The easy-to-navigate guidelines are packed with useful examples and concrete information about brand assets.

What’s more, the colorful style helps to highlight the unique personality of the company.

https://s3.amazonaws.com/arena-attachments/2024336/d596912dd18d7f6e2115437957a6aa26.pdf?1523386550



Coca-Cola

Another excellent example of an interactive brand book, the Coca-Cola guidelines share valuable insights into the history of the brand, its evolution, tone of voice, and even its target audience. Users can flip through pages one at a time and see a host of interesting images and guidelines.

This brand book is great because it captures the core essence of the company.

https://issuu.com/millyhobbs/docs/coca_cola_brand_book__1_



Spotify

The Spotify brand book is a colorful and engaging document, covering everything from the brand's primary icon to its color palette and even examples of logo misuse. There's a handy contents page at the beginning, so users can easily jump to the content most relevant to them.

https://gingersauce.co/brand-books/spotify-brand-book/



Google

Clean, clear, and interactive, the Google brand book comes in the form of a comprehensive resource section on its website. You can find out which Google brand elements can be used with and without permission, how to leverage the Google logo and more.

The animated brand book provides useful insight into everything you need to know about the business.

https://about.google/brand-resource-center/

Crafting the ultimate brand book

So, what is a brand book? Simply put, it’s a complete guide to everything anyone might need to know about your business. It’s a comprehensive blueprint outlining your company’s personality, identity, visual presence, and tone of voice.

Used correctly, this simple document will ensure you can

present a consistent experience to everyone who interacts with your brand.

While crafting a brand book can take some time and planning, it can save you from making disastrous mistakes in your branding strategy.

If you’re struggling to create your brand book from scratch, consider working with an expert like Fabrik to ensure you can design the ultimate guide for your internal and external audience.

Fabrik: A branding agency for our times.