What is brand essence? Searching for the soul in your brand

Category: Branding
written by Steve Harvey | 8 January 2019
How do you define the heart and soul of your brand?

A brand is a highly nebulous concept that can be difficult for any business leader to cultivate – that's why so many people come to strategic branding companies like Fabrik for help.

Today's companies must differentiate themselves if they want to remain competitive in today's marketplace. However, it's no longer enough to have the best prices, or even the most effective products to help you stand out. Today's market leaders need to create the right feeling in their audience through emotional, personality-focused campaigns.

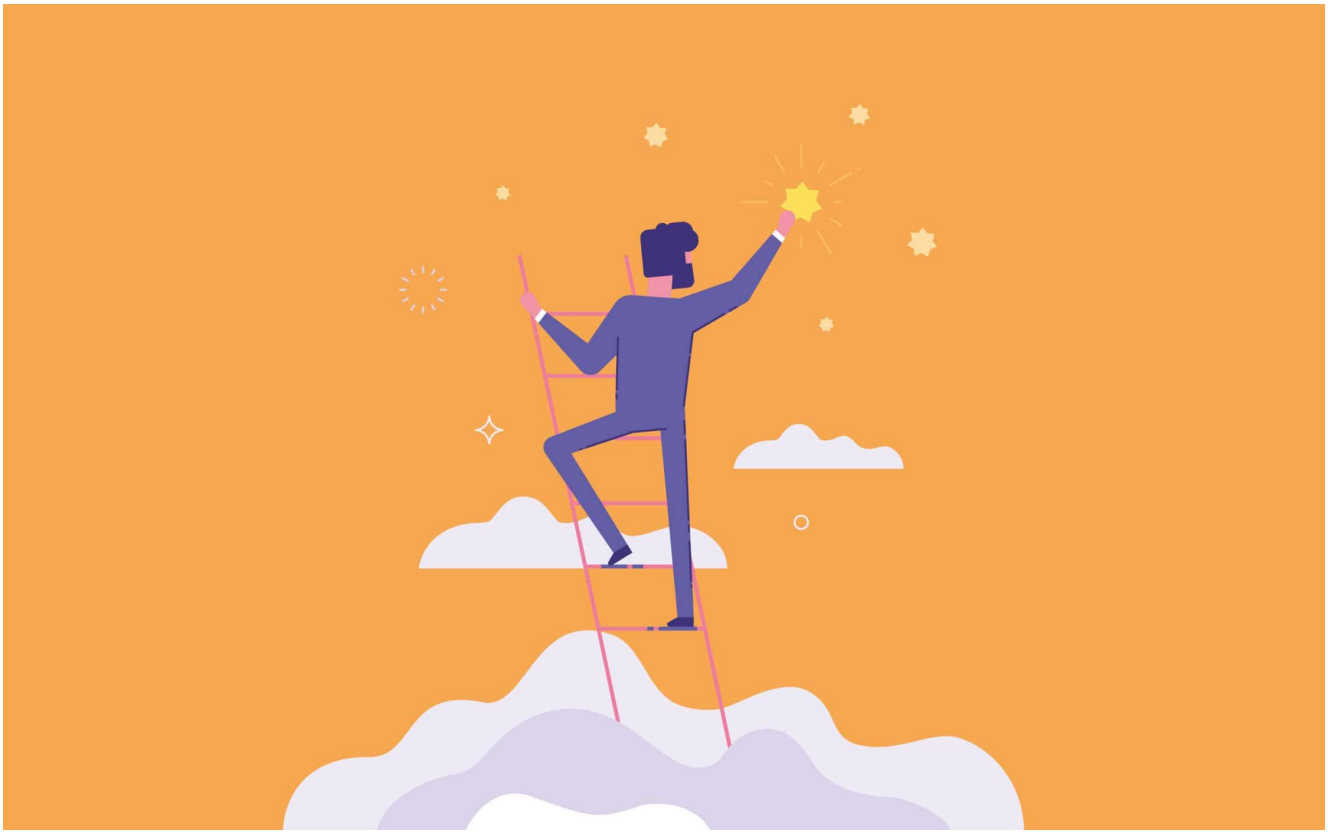
While there are many different characteristics behind any organisation, a "brand essence" refers to the core identity of your company. This intangible concept separates you from other competitors through affinity-focused factors that make your company more relatable.

Some businesses are highly professional, technically savvy and forward-thinking. Others focus on delivering a warm and welcoming experience to customers, with values like exceptional service.

Once you define brand essence for your organisation, you can use it as "ground zero" for the rest of your reputation-building strategy. With the heart of your company in mind, it's much easier to design logos, marketing campaigns, and even taglines that speak to your audience.

So, what is brand essence, and how do you find yours?

Let’s find out.



What is brand essence? Defining better branding

What is brand essence?

As mentioned above, your brand essence definition exists at the core of your company’s strategy for growth. Your essence brings together concepts like values, mission statements and brand visions to determine what you stand for as a company and guide you into the future.

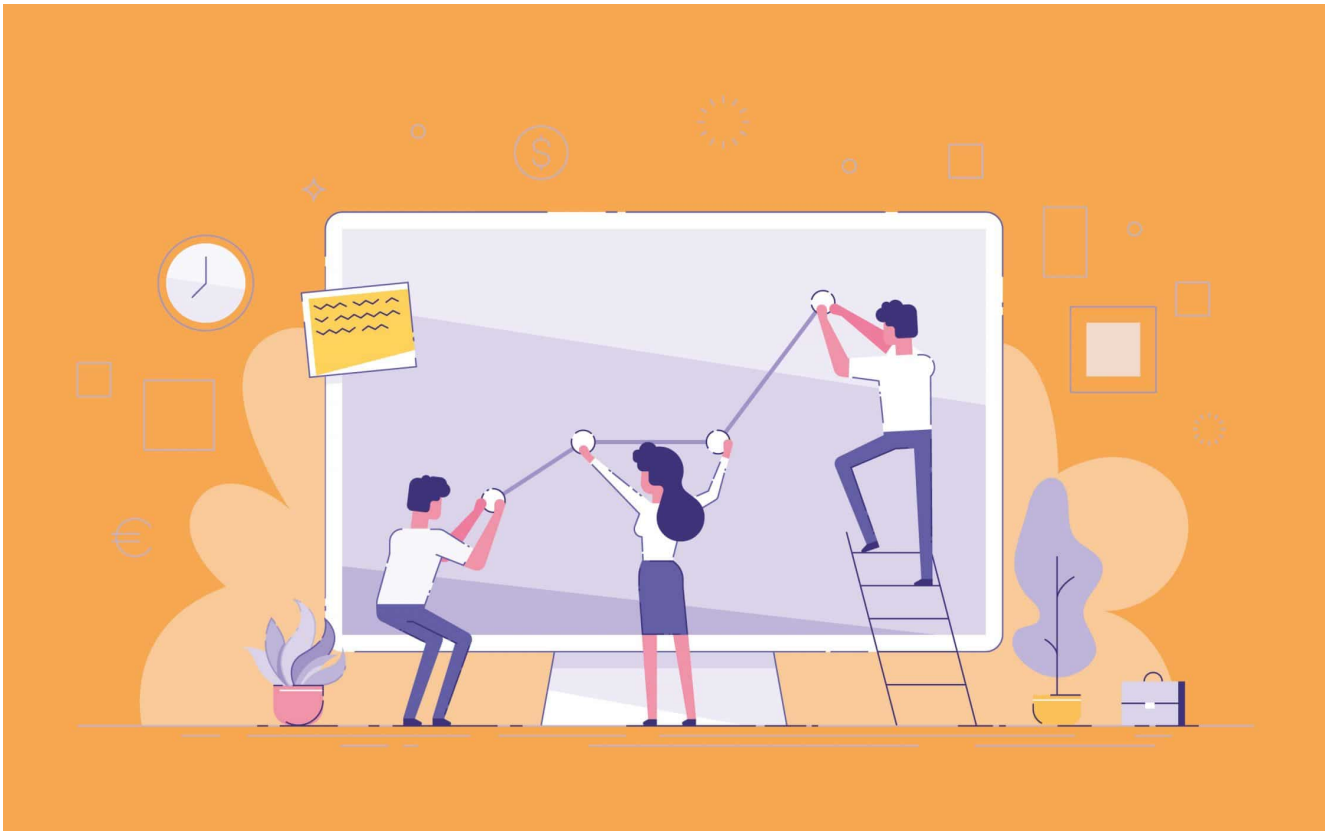
Think of brand essence as the soul or DNA of your company. If you know exactly what your business is all about, you’ll have an easier time conveying your meaning to your customers too.

Usually, companies describe their “essence” within a couple of words. For instance, you’ve probably heard of brand essence

examples like Nike's "Innovation and Inspiration," or Airbnb's "Belonging." These words highlight the company's raison d'etre and let customers know if they're connecting with the right people. The formula for a brand essence definition would look something like this:

Brand Essence	=	**Goals** (what you want to do)	+	**What you do** (USP)	+	**Your values** (how you do what you do)

If a brand is a collection of all the thoughts and feelings associated with a company, a brand essence is at the centre of it all. Your essence gives depth to your USP by going beyond price and product features, educates your audience, and also helps you to develop a reputation in your chosen field. Over time, you'll find that an effective brand essence definition even helps you to attract the right audiences, by creating advocates and ambassadors.



The importance of inner meaning: Why define brand essence?

Now that you know what it is, it's time to consider why finding a brand essence meaning is so important. After all, there are a lot of steps involved in building an effective brand.

If you look at some examples of brand essence, like Volvo's "Safety" for instance, you see that a brand essence definition simply allows you to put the soul of your company into words. A brand essence makes it easier for you and your customers or shareholders to see what your business is, what you want it to be, and what you're doing to remain as "authentic" as possible.

The best companies often use brand essence as a compass in their decision making. For instance, Volvo will always put extra steps into their production process if it means delivering extra security and peace of mind for customers. By using their brand essence as a North Star, the company ensures stronger connections with their audience. Some of the benefits of a brand essence definition include:

1. Better marketing

When you understand precisely what's driving your company and setting you apart from your competitors, you can develop stronger advertising and awareness-building campaigns. Today, it's more important than ever for organisations to connect with their audiences on an emotional level. If you know that you define yourself as "Caring and Honest," then you can put those principles first when creating messages to appeal to people that value respect and authenticity.

Brand essence allows you to get emotional with your marketing efforts, and it will also guide you towards the campaigns that

are more likely to help your organisation. For instance, a brand with a “modern” essence might use the latest technology like VR or IoT to advertise a new product.

2. Appeal to higher expectations

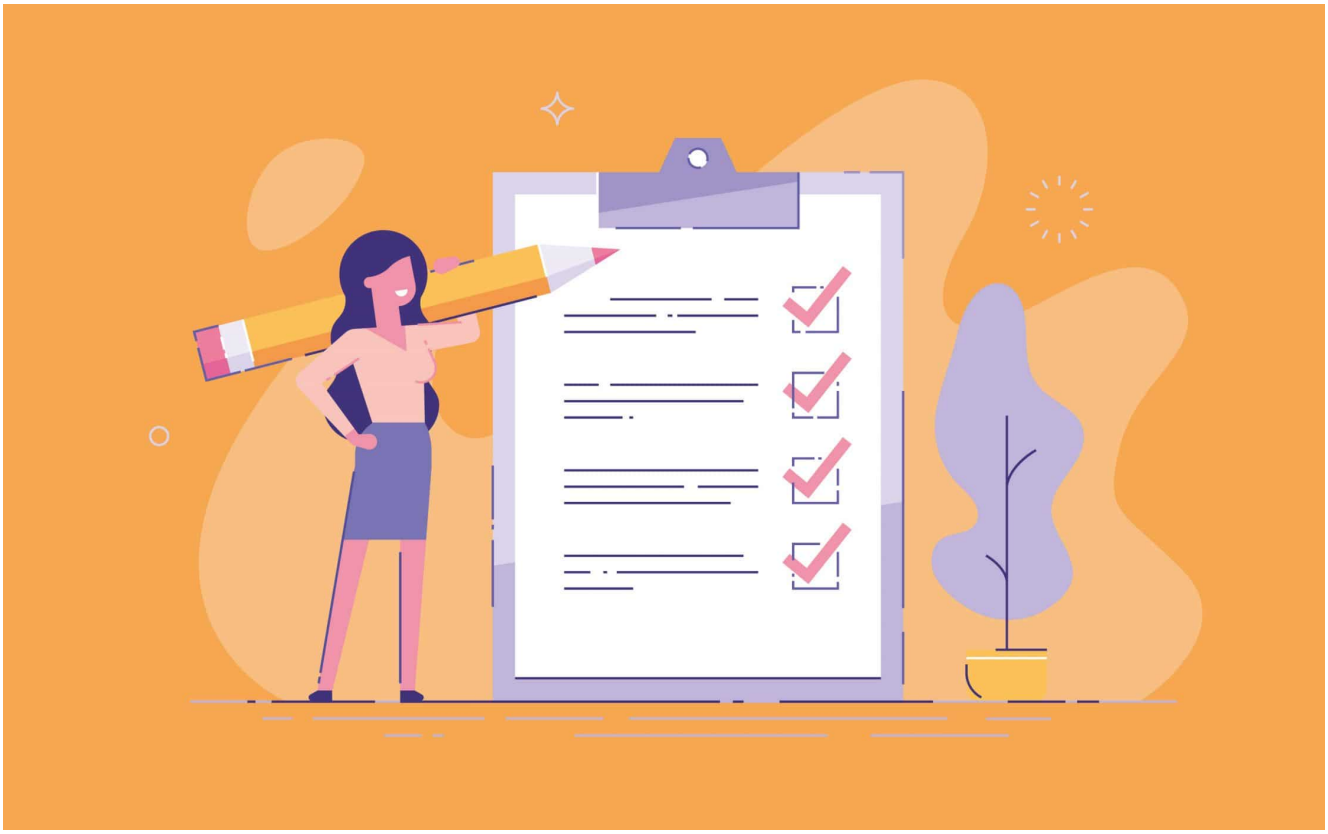
Even if you haven’t been in business for long, there’s a good chance you’ve already noticed how highly-connected today’s customers are. We’re living in a world of connected continuously and empowered customers, which also means that you need to meet escalated expectations.

Today’ customers are more discerning and demanding than ever. This means that gimmicks and price battles won’t give your company the growth power it needs anymore. Instead, companies need to find a more appealing way to build bonds with their audience. The essence of a brand is what inspires customers to fall in love with it. People will begin to attribute human characteristics to your company, and that’s where feelings of commitment and loyalty come from.

3. Maintain consistency

Finally, there is a range of different “brand statements” that go into a compelling brand manifesto. You might have a mission statement, a brand promise, and even a USP document. While each of these files has their own specific benefits, they, and your brand essence definition will all help with one key thing: consistency.

In today’s competitive world, it can be difficult to remain aware of the current trends and maintain a consistent identity at the same time. When you understand the elements that define the soul of your company, it’s much easier to make cohesive decisions for your business. Whenever you’re unsure about a new marketing strategy or product idea, you can look at your brand essence to direct you.



Tips for refining your brand essence meaning

Like many things in branding and the marketing mix, though brand essence is essential, it's not always easy to define. The best examples of brand essence often strike a balance between the authentic qualities that your company already demonstrates and the aspirational elements that you want to embody in the future.

Usually, the best way to discover your brand essence meaning, and begin developing guidelines for your company, is to look for input from people both outside and inside of your organisation. Team members and stakeholders will be able to show you what your business currently means to the world, while branding experts can help you to build a strategy for your future.

Once you've assembled a team to help you with your brand essence definition, the hardest step is to get the initial

creative juices flowing. Here are some tips to get you started.

1. Go back to the beginning

There are many companies that create their brand essence statement before launching their business, as part of a complete brand-building strategy. However, there are also companies that get so caught up with other things, like logo creation and website building that they forget about essence until the last minute. No matter which camp you fall into, the best place to start searching for meaning, is at the beginning.

Look back at where your company came from. What motivated you to launch your product or service in the first place (besides profit), and what did you feel was your ultimate purpose as a brand? If you're having a hard time finding ideas, try creating a brand documentary full of stories from people around your company. These differing interpretations of how your business began will give you an insight into what kind of organisation you're running.

2. Consider how other people see you

How you would describe your business, and how other people perceive you aren't always things that go hand-in-hand. While you shouldn't necessarily allow your clients and competitors to define you, it is helpful to listen to how others see your brand, so you can get a better idea of how you come across in the current marketplace. If nothing else, a brief audit will give you a chance to pinpoint any characteristics that you'd rather not have linked to your company.

A good way to make sure that your audit is comprehensive is to imagine that you're creating an obituary for your business. Write a list of all the things people would say about your brand if it was a person that had passed away, then look for

trends.

3. Work outwards from your points of differentiation

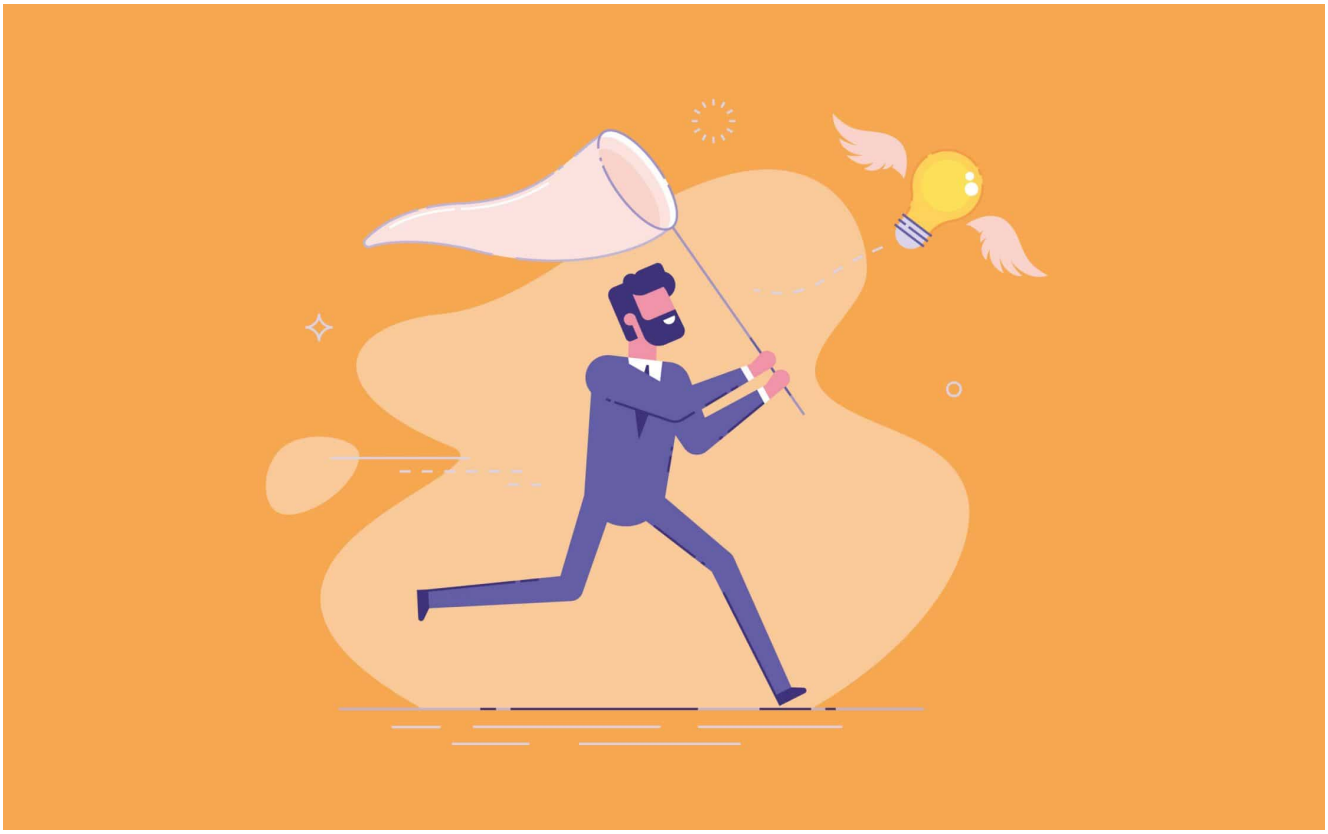
Finding your brand essence definition is crucial because it helps you to define and refine what makes your company special. With that in mind, it makes sense to look at the things that you do or offer that your competitors simply don't have. Look at your competitors and figure out what your company can provide that they can't.

One good idea is to use the "BARATA" formula for differentiation. This means looking at the benefits, attributes, roles, attitudes, territory, and awareness elements of your company to see where you differ from the crowd. Once you've found out what makes you different, ask yourself why those differences are useful. After all, a fork with twisted prongs might be unique, but that doesn't necessarily make it appealing.

4. Get technical

Sometimes, to define something as intangible and complicated as brand essence, you need to get technical. The best way to do this is to work with a branding company like Fabrik, which knows its way around things like brand archetypes and mission statements.

A technical evaluation of your brand can help you to see parts of your identity that you never considered before. When you immerse yourselves in all of the complicated steps that go into building an effective business, it's easier to see where your company is ticking all of the right boxes. You'll also be able to see whether there are attributes in your brand essence that need to improve or grow to help you achieve your goals.



9 Principles to follow when describing brand essence

Interpreting brand essence is a complex process.

While there's too much to cover in this guide, we can help you to grasp the basics that you need to consider when you define brand essence. The best place to start is to look at the 9 essential criteria for brand essence developed by branding extraordinaire Kirk Phillips.

Kirk is a thought leader in the branding space, known for writing guidelines that help to determine whether a brand essence statement is strong enough. Here are the 9 principles to look for when you examine brand essence examples:

1. Is it unique?

Your brand essence isn't just about defining your company, it's also a way to set yourself apart from the competitors in

your space. That means that you can't just copy and paste someone else's identity. Ask yourself how your essence makes you special, and whether customers will be able to use it when choosing between you and other brands.

2. How you thought about intangibles?

According to Kirk Phillips, the things that differentiate your brand can't just be tangible concepts like price and product features. You'll need to think carefully about how you make your audience feel with your brand assets.

3. Are you focused? (Single-minded)

Most examples of brand essence include between one and three words used to describe a company. That means that you can't just throw together paragraphs of adjectives and claim that they define your brand. You'll need to focus to find the absolute heart of your company. What drives your business more than anything else?

4. Is it experiential?

Your brand essence needs to encapsulate what people will feel when they engage in experiences with your brand. For instance, does your bank make people feel safe and well-protected when they're in a branch or checking their statements online? If so, "safety" may be part of your essence.

5. Is it meaningful?

If your brand essence doesn't have meaning, then it's not going to help your company. Don't just choose a word because it sounds good, or because you want to compete with specific businesses. Select a brand essence that really speak to you.

6. Is it consistent?

Your brand essence is one of the key elements that defines your company and makes your business stand out. This means that you need to consistently express your essence in everything that you do and say. Whether you're refining your tone of voice or investing in a new social media campaign, keep your essence in mind.

7. Is it authentic?

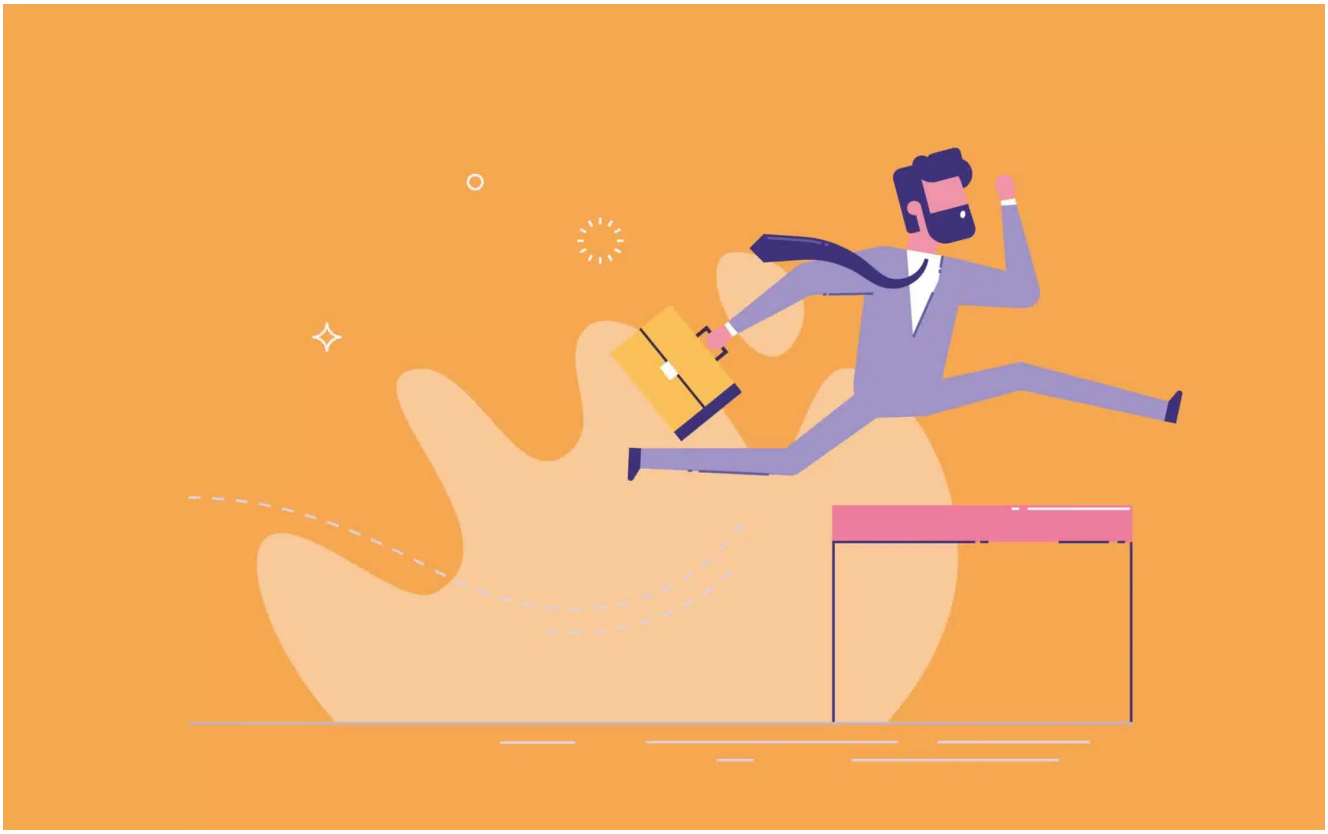
Simply telling people that you're "reliable" won't mean much if you can't also take steps to prove that you're as dependable as you claim to be. Choose a brand essence definition that's important to you and your customers and one that you can stick with.

8. Is it sustainable?

While various aspects of your brand can change, from your logo to your website design, a brand essence definition is something that needs to stay the same over time. Ask yourself if your brand essence is timeless.

9. Is it scalable?

Finally, just because your brand essence is resilient, doesn't mean that it shouldn't be able to grow and evolve. Make sure that you can continue to expand on your essence and give it greater depth as your business transforms.



Brand essence examples to inspire your team

Ultimately, a brand essence definition is made up of numerous components, including your services as a business, your personality, your USPs, and more. Combining all of these unique ingredients together gives you an essence that fuels your "brand promise" – the thing that you want all your customers to know and understand about your organisation.

Get your brand essence right, and you instantly become more memorable, giving weight to your reputation and identity. Just look at the essence statements of these brands for instance:

- Nike: Inspiration and imagination.
- Haagen Dazs: Gold standard.
- Coca-Cola: Refreshment.
- Apple: Simplicity.
- Disney: Magical.

Whether you agree with the terms used to describe these examples of brand essence or not, each company has worked hard to define what they want their organisation to be known for. With these simple words, these businesses can guide and inform everything they do, from product development to customer experience. Let's take a closer look at how brand presence examples come to life in everyday situations.

1. Haagen Dazs

Haagen Dazs wants to be known as the "gold standard" in ice cream. To portray that identity or brand "essence" the company infuses luxury into everything it does. Even parts of the packaging are golden.



When Haagen Dazs started to consider creating larger tubs of ice cream, the business leaders needed to think about how they would price their product to maintain their identity, how they could present the product, and even how the lining of a larger tub might affect the flavour or quality of the product.

2. Volvo

Volvo's brand essence is all about "safety." Although the company might not produce the safest car in the world according to crash test results, it certainly does its best to put its customers' mind at ease. Volvo is always on the cutting edge when it comes to producing the latest security features, including side airbags and rear-vision cameras.



Volvo will even ignore other technological innovations like GPS and radio transmitters so that it can place more of its resource and development budget into safety. Though this may be frustrating for some customers, it's a good example of how brands need to stick religiously to their chosen brand essence.

3. Nike

The Nike brand essence is one of the best known in the world. Nike is all about "Inspiration and Imagination" – and you can see that in everything they produce. The Nike logo or "swoosh" which looks like a tick – an affirmative shape. The name

“Nike” is based on the Greek word for victory, and it links back to the Greek goddess of victory with the same name too. Even the marketing campaigns that Nike produces are all about inspiration.



Just look at the “Just Do It” campaign, for example, which is designed to convince audience members that with the help of Nike, they can accomplish anything. This is a sports brand that appeals not just to professional athletes, but to the active people inside of everyone.

Discover the essence of your brand

So, are you ready to find your brand essence definition?

As mentioned above, the easiest way to get started is with help from a professional team. A creative group like Fabrik can use the latest branding techniques, workshops and methodologies to discover what your business stands for, and what it needs to portray to the world.

Having someone on the outside looking into your brand is

crucial because a brand relies on the perceptions that others have of your business. However, that doesn't mean that you can't start working on your brand essence alone. The more you learn about the values, visions, and missions that drive your company, the more you'll be able to understand what makes you unique.

To define brand essence, you need to start by determining what sets you apart and finish by constructing a story that shares your differences with the world. Once you use brand essence to build your narrative, you'll have a valuable asset you can use to direct and support your growth for years to come.

In essence, brand essence is the story of your company. It's where you came from, what you are, and what you want to be, as well as how you hope to get there.

Are you ready to find your narrative? Contact Fabrik today!

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