What is corporate identity? The elements and definition of corporate identity

Category: Identity
written by Stewart Hodgson | 8 March 2023
What is corporate identity? If you've ever worked with a business or considered building one of your own, you might have encountered the term "corporate identity."

This phrase is often used in meetings about branding, marketing, and business development, but what does it mean, and why is corporate identity important?

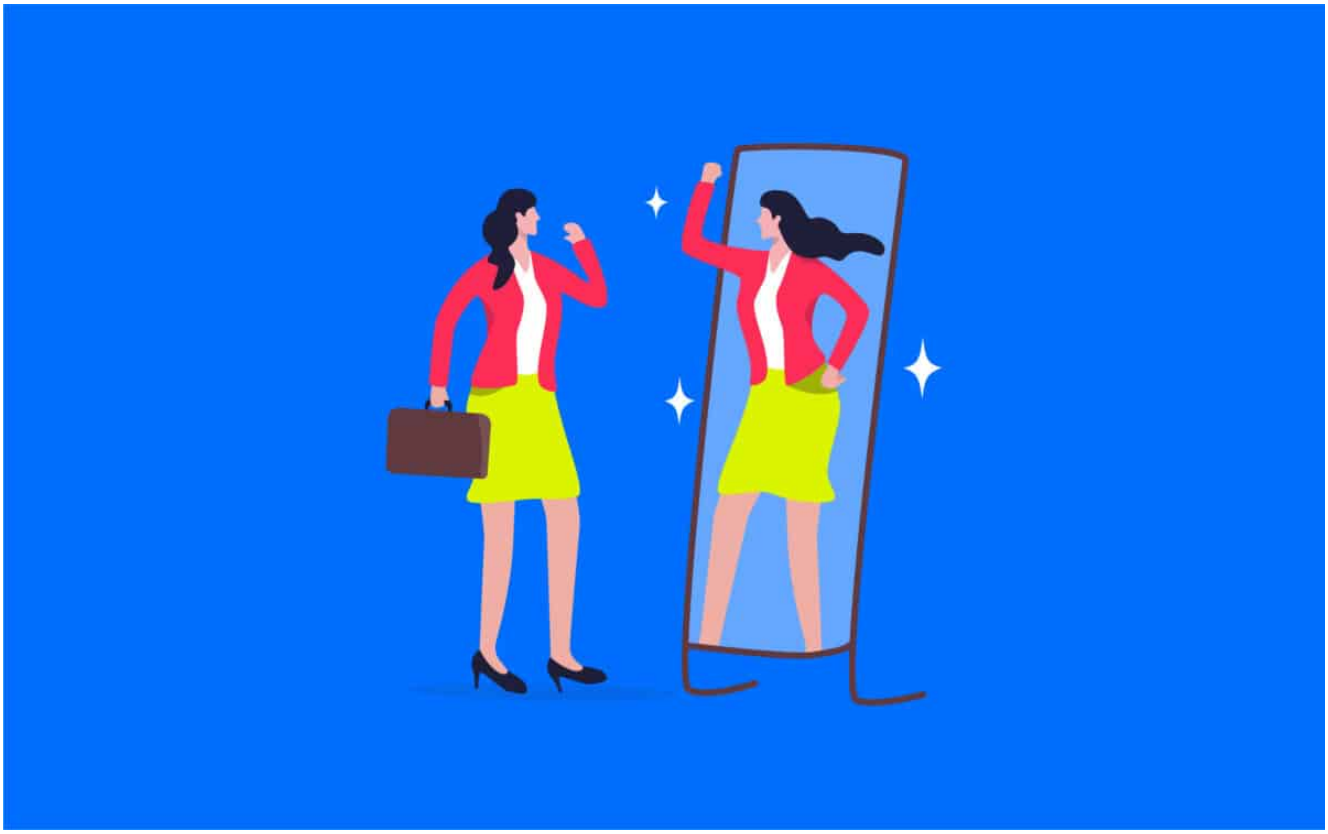
Corporate identity can be a somewhat complex term for businesses to understand because it refers to various concepts. Essentially, a corporate identity consists of all the components a business uses to differentiate its organization and reach a specific audience.

Similar to a brand, corporate identities help organizations to shape public perceptions.

An effective corporate identity should empower a company to highlight its unique personality, share its values with its target audience, and develop brand equity.

More than just a tool for promoting businesses to consumers, corporate identities can also assist with attracting talent and stakeholders to an organization, paving the way for rapid growth.

Today, we will explore the meaning of corporate identity, its main components, and why it matters so much to modern brands.



What is corporate identity: Corporate identity definition

Let’s start with the basics: what is the meaning of corporate identity? The meaning of corporate identity and the meaning of corporate image is often confused in the business world.

A corporate identity is all of the elements that shape how you present your venture to the outside world. It consists of everything from your tone of voice to your marketing campaigns.

A corporate image, on the other hand, focuses specifically on your brand’s visual assets. Your image might include your logo, chosen typography, brand colors, and packaging choices.

When building “corporate guidelines” for corporate identity, companies focus on the whole impact of the business on virtually every community base.

You’ll think about your corporate communications and how you

interact with consumers and shareholders, your marketing channels, promotional methods, go-to-market strategy, and your brand image.

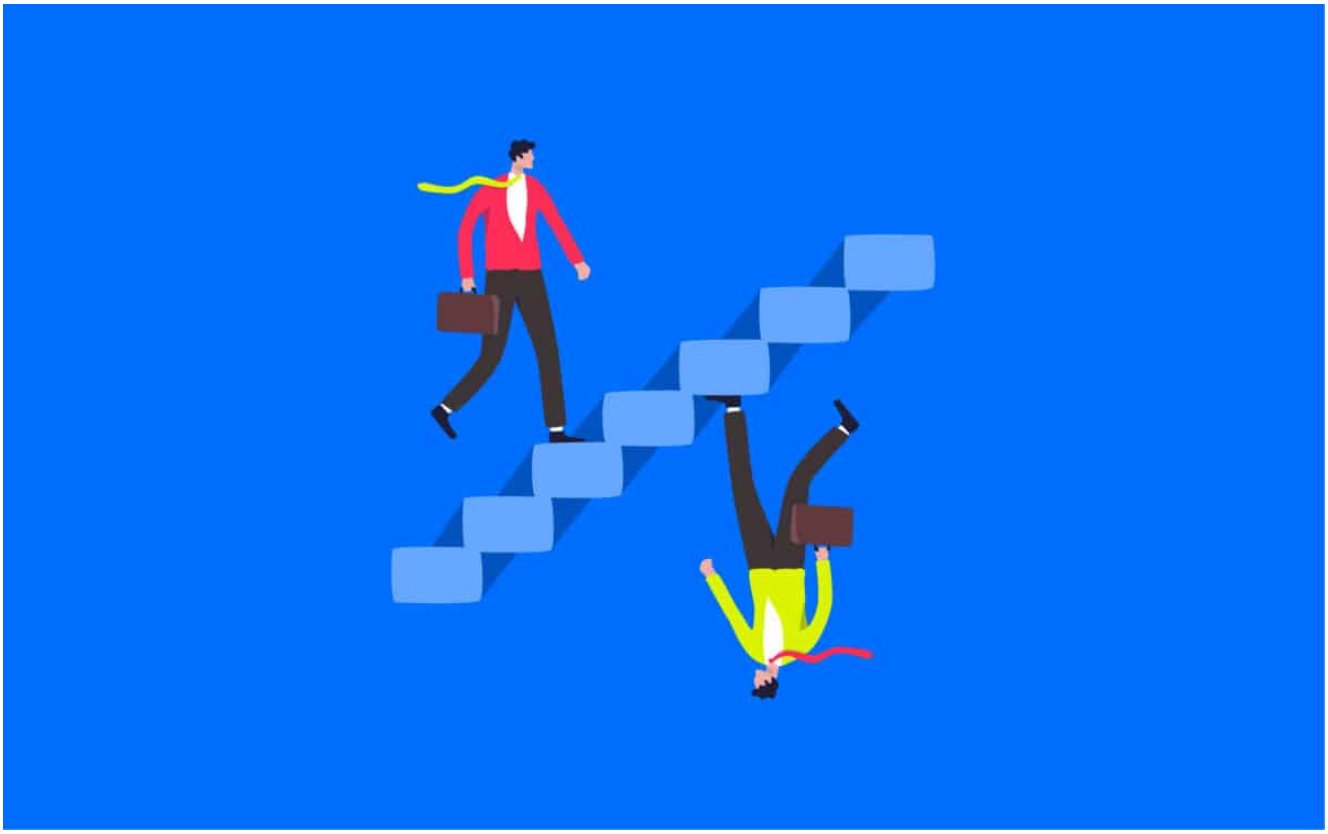
Corporate identity is essentially just another term for “public image.” It refers to how you alter customers’ feelings towards your brand with many different strategies.

Your corporate ID can even shape how you showcase your company with staff uniforms, dress codes, signage, and event presentations.

What are the main components of corporate identity?

As mentioned above, the components of corporate identity can include virtually every asset or strategy a business uses to differentiate itself from the competition and stand out. Corporate identity components may consist of the following:

- Guidelines for corporate behavior.
- Corporate image (logos, fonts, color choices, and website design).
- Marketing and promotional strategies.
- Tone of voice and brand personality.
- Product packaging techniques.
- Go-to-market strategies and partnerships.
- Staff uniforms and dress codes.
- Signage and printed materials.



What is the difference between brand and corporate image?

The definition of corporate identity outlined above might sound familiar if you're familiar with brand identity. The two concepts two have a lot of similarities.

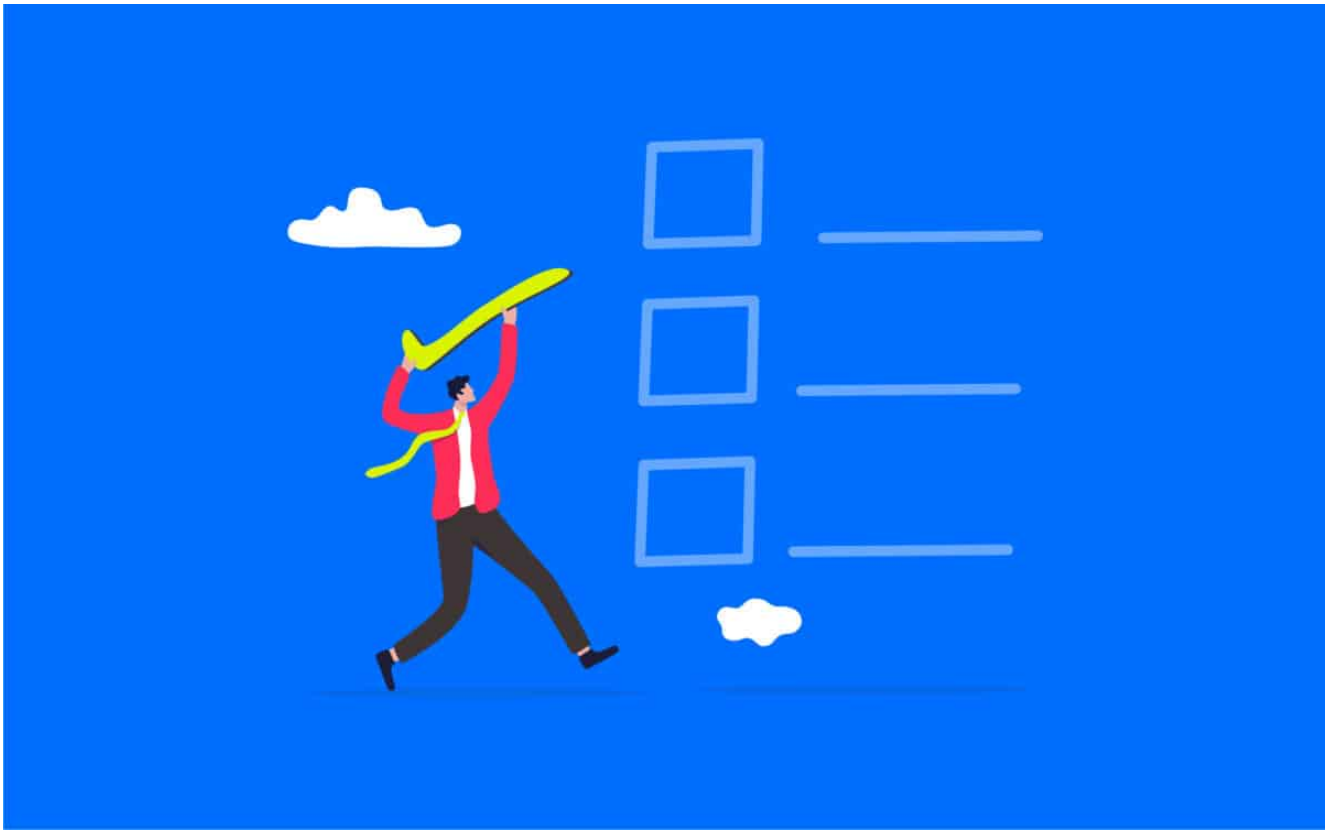
Corporate and brand identities shape perceptions of your organization through marketing, messaging, and visuals. However, there are some core differences between the two concepts.

Primarily, your brand identity will typically look at how you position your company in the eyes of your customers. It concentrates on highlighting the unique benefits of your services or goods and making sure they stand out from other options on the market.

A corporate identity is a little broader in scope. It speaks to your company's values, ethics, and focus. With a corporate

identity, you’re not just trying to engage customers. You’re also convincing stakeholders, investors, shareholders, and employees your business is worthwhile.

The overall purpose of corporate identity is to facilitate the realization of crucial organizational objectives, such as increasing brand awareness, establishing company culture, and building brand awareness. Brand and corporate identity typically go hand-in-hand.



The 3 elements of corporate identity

The components of corporate identity all work together to create a cohesive, recognizable, and distinctive personality for the business.

Most companies will base their corporate identity on their knowledge of their target audience and their understanding of the broader market, shareholder interests, and similar values.

The process of developing a corporate identity typically comes down to managing three main “elements” of corporate identity, these are:

1. Corporate communications

The term “corporate communications” refers to how an organization interacts with internal and external audiences. It consists of everything from promotional marketing strategies designed to reach customers to the strategies companies use to connect with shareholders.

Corporate communications can also include overviews of public relations management, reputation management, media interactions, and investor relations.

The core elements of corporate communications are:

Internal communications

Policies, procedures, operating standards, team communications, internal newsletters, and everything involved in connecting with employees.

Paid communications

Messages sent through paid media outlets to communities, such as advertisements, sponsorships, or events.

Media relations

Relationships built with media outlets and earned content environments such as magazines and news reports.

Investor relations

How a company connects with investors and attracts new shareholders for the organization.

2. Corporate design

Corporate design refers specifically to the elements of “corporate image” a company invests in when differentiating itself from its competitors. A corporate design strategy involves all of the visual identity components of the brand, from the logo and name to the brand colors and tagline.

The major components of corporate design include:

Logos

Your logo is one of the most important parts of your visual identity. It helps audiences instantly recognize your organization and sets you apart from your competitors.

Colors

Your brand color palette can help you emotionally engage your clients. Different colors are associated with specific concepts in the branding world.

Fonts

Most corporate identity guidelines include insights into what kinds of typography to use in website design and public communications.

Website

A website is an integral part of your brand image in the digital world. It acts as the virtual “storefront” for your business.

Offline assets

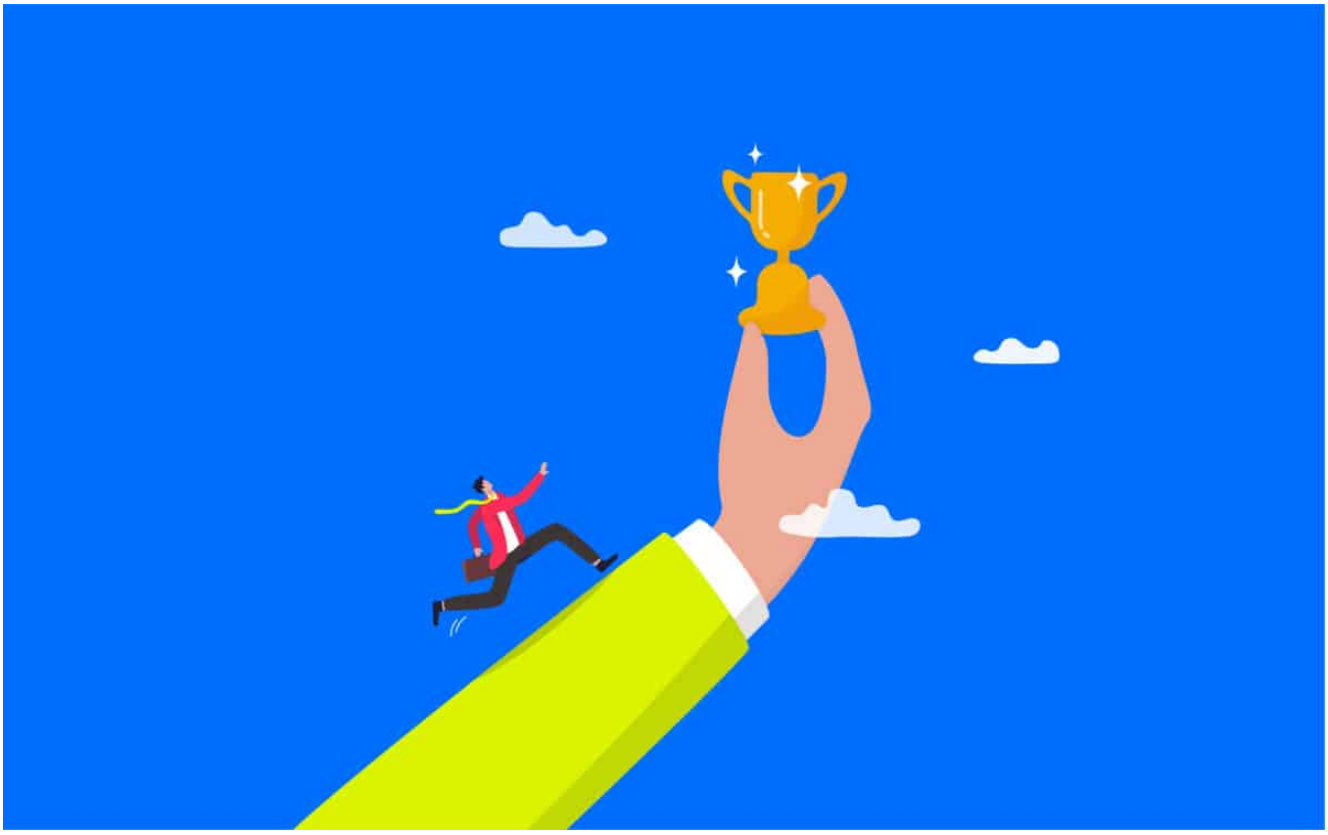
Offline assets like an interior of an office, wayfinding, and signage are all parts of a corporate design strategy, as are leaflets and printed promotions.

3. Corporate behavior

Corporate behavior refers to the overall activities and behaviors of the company. It includes concepts like the company's mission statement, social responsibility strategies, and code of conduct. With corporate behavior, businesses demonstrate their unique values and philosophies to their audience.

Corporate behavior dictates how the company acts as a single entity in various environments. It determines how employees should behave when in the office and how individuals should interact with various community members in unique settings.

Corporate behavior is often inspired heavily by the unique vision and mission a company wants to convey to its target audience. It revolves heavily around things like sustainability, ethics, and a sense of responsibility held by the business.



Why is corporate identity important?

The importance of corporate identity should never be underestimated.

Corporate guidelines and policies don't just help to distinguish a brand as being unique from its competitors. The right corporate ID will also boost brand awareness and strengthen relationships between an organization and its intended customers, employees, and shareholders.

The significance of corporate image can be seen in the activities of countless leading brands. Indeed, many of the top companies in the world are successful because of their corporate identity. The main benefits of good corporate identity management include the following:

Differentiation

Corporate identities outline exactly what makes a business unique. A well-planned strategy helps companies to position themselves as "better" than their competitors in specific areas, focused on a series of USPs.

Brand awareness

Corporate identity also helps to dictate how the company positions itself in its industry to generate brand awareness and recognition. Corporate identities communicate the promise of the brand to internal and external audiences.

Market presence

A strong corporate identity can make a company appear more credible, authentic, and professional. This enhances brand equity and makes it easier for business leaders to attract stakeholders and investors.

Reputation

With a consistent and powerful corporate identity and good service and marketing strategies, businesses can strengthen their reputation among their target audience. The better a brand’s reputation, the more it’ll grow.

Customer loyalty

Showcasing the right corporate identity helps business leaders connect with customers emotionally, which can pave the way for greater brand loyalty. Loyal customers also contribute to increased revenue.

Perhaps most importantly, a strong corporate identity guideline set also contributes to cohesion. When the identity of a business is clear, it’s more likely that business leaders will be able to preserve a consistent image for their organization across all channels.



What is included in a corporate identity package?

Many organizations partner with branding and marketing experts to help build an effective corporate identity.

These agencies and organizations can offer “corporate identity packages.” Essentially, these are a selection of assets and tools created for the business to help establish and grow its corporate identity.

The exact components included in a corporate identity package can vary depending on the business you choose to work with.

However, some of the key elements may include:

- Corporate identity management services (for preserving brand reputation).
- Corporate identity guidelines outlining style, visuals, and language.
- Logo design and website design.
- Printed and offline media creation.
- Marketing and promotional strategies.
- Content creation for websites and blogs.
- Color palette creation.
- Personality and tone of voice guidelines.
- Policies and standard operating procedures.
- Corporate communication guidelines.

Corporate identity examples

Looking at examples of corporate identity and examples of corporate image can be an excellent way for new business leaders to start developing their own guidelines.

As mentioned above, most of the successful businesses you’re

familiar with today have achieved their targets through a strong corporate identity.

Here are some corporate identity examples worth looking at for inspiration.



Apple

Apple has a strong and cohesive corporate identity, outlined in an easy-to-follow brand booklet. Operating in the competitive technology space, Apple has built its corporate identity around concepts like inclusion and innovation.

The company focuses on making its products and services easy to use while constantly working on new ways to change the market.

Every part of Apple's identity, from its "Think Different" slogan to its unique name, helps it stand out as an innovator. Not to mention, Apple consistently takes part in events and conferences which showcase its latest creations.

Apple also shows its commitment to serving its customers with unique “Genius” professionals designed to help consumers with any issues they might have.

Apple delivers educational programs to suppliers to keep them on the cutting edge, uses clean and sleek imagery in its branding to highlight its modern nature, and always keeps up to date with the latest promotional strategies.

Starbucks

Few coffee brands have the same appeal as Starbucks. While many have their own unique processes and products, Starbucks stands out in the current market because of its corporate identity. The organization positions itself as friendly, inclusive, and “premium.”

Perhaps one of the most compelling aspects of Starbucks’ corporate identity is the unique atmosphere it builds for its consumers. Every Starbucks location is intended to be friendly and welcoming, with carefully chosen music playlists and a strong focus on engaging customer service.

Starbucks also takes its social responsibility strategies very seriously. It allows customers to use recycled beans for composting and employs refugees. It also helps farmers and bean growers around the world to manage economically.

Airbnb

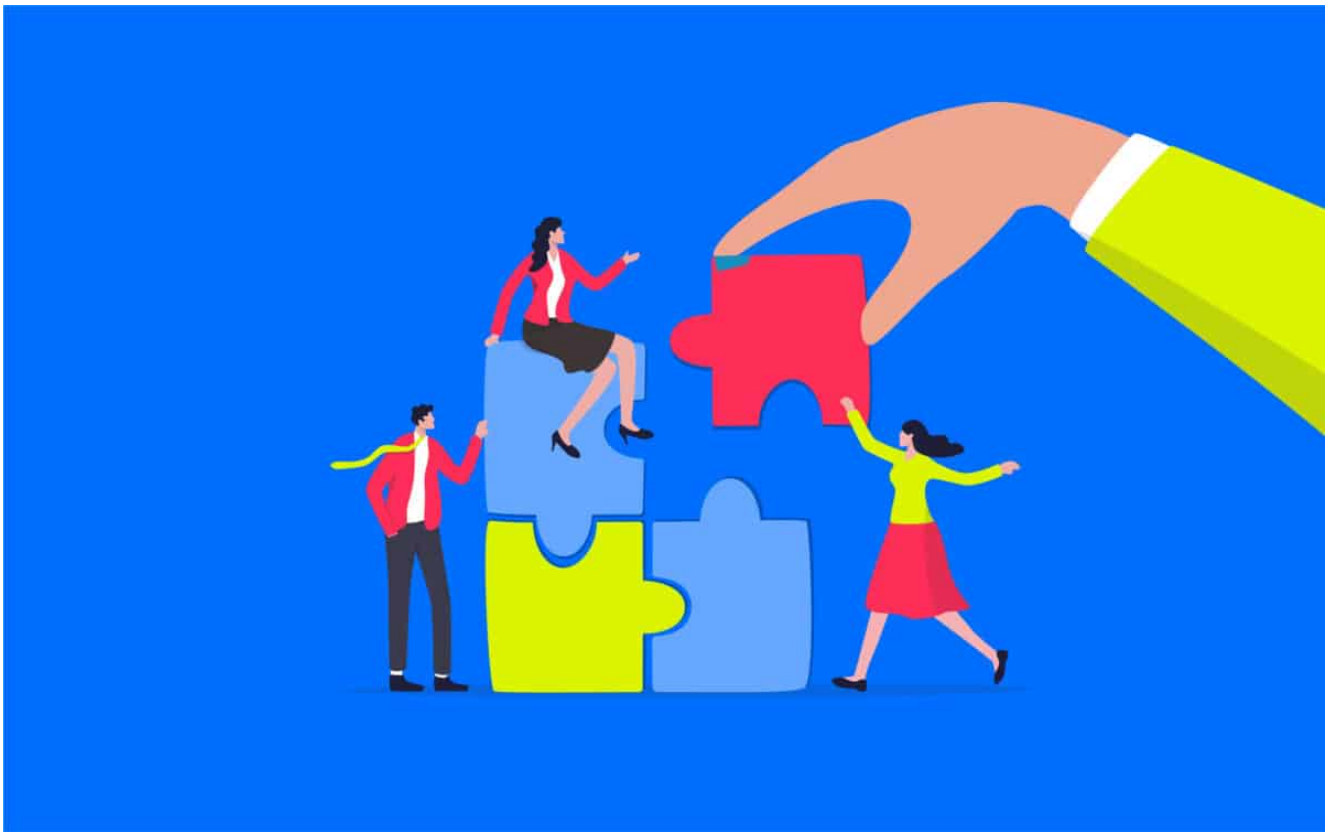
Another excellent example of corporate identity comes from Airbnb. The famous home-sharing company has focused its strategy on being recognized as friendly, accessible, and forward-thinking.

The “belong anywhere” slogan used by the brand, alongside its logo in the shape of a heart, makes the company appear compassionate.

The marketing strategies used by Airbnb echo this sentiment. The company posts home listings on social media with eye-catching and emotional descriptions. The brand also has a fantastic blog that shares advice and tips for home hosts and travelers.

Airbnb also has quite a compelling corporate image. Alongside authentic photographs of people and homes, the company regularly creates unique graphics and illustrations to make it look more fun and friendly.

Everything Airbnb does is designed to make it appear warm and engaging. Airbnb wants every customer, employee, and shareholder to feel welcome.



Corporate identity management

How to build a corporate identity

Now you know the answer to “what is corporate identity?” it’s worth thinking about how to begin creating your own.

An effective corporate identity takes time, patience, and care to build. In most cases, you can only really get started once your internal team is aligned on your brand's missions, values, personality, positioning, and messaging.

Every individual involved in creating and promoting the business should also be involved in defining the brand identity. This will make brand identity management and cohesion easier in the years to come as the company evolves.

Here are some of the steps involved in building a corporate identity:

1. Conduct a brand audit

The first step in cultivating a compelling brand identity is conducting an audit. This essentially evaluates everything the business stands for and where it stands in the marketplace.

An audit should look at everything from who the top competitors are for the company, who their target audience should be, and what the missions and values of the business are.

Outline the USP or unique points of the business and what makes the company special. Decide where your values will lie and what you want customers to think about your organization. Most importantly, determine how you will differentiate yourself from the other ventures in your space.

2. Refine your corporate messaging

Once you have a clear view of what your brand is all about, the next step is developing messaging statements that help convey your company's critical components to the right audience. You will need different messaging statements for different groups.

For example, the messaging statement to outline the benefits

of investing to a shareholder will be different from those used to attract customers and employees.

Determine the core promise you want to make to each group you want to communicate with and how you will make your message stand out. Decide on your tone of voice and the personality you want to infuse into your language.

You can also think about the marketing and messaging channels you will use.

3. Develop creative visual elements

After you've finalized your messaging statements, it's time to begin working on the visual aspects of your corporate identity. These visual components, such as your logo, color palettes, and website design, should all contribute to the core message you're trying to send.

Think about the visual elements that may influence how consumers and other individuals think about you.

It's important not to focus exclusively on your logo but also addresses concepts like employee uniforms and office buildings. Look at your offline and online presence, and ensure every aspect of your visual image appeals to your target audience.

4. Create strategies for managing brand identity

Corporate identity management is ensuring your overall identity remains cohesive and consistent from one environment or channel to the next.

To ensure you're sending the right message in all instances, you'll need to design policies and documents that help guide your employees and anyone else you may be working with.

Create a set of brand guidelines with instructions on using brand assets for marketing and promotion.

- **Define** your specific color palettes, word options, and language choices.
- **Create** standard operating procedures for your employees, whether they're involved in employee service, support, marketing, or sales.
- **Decide** how to monitor your brand reputation and performance over time to ensure you're keeping sight of your corporate identity.

5. Analyze and optimize

Finally, you'll need to think about how you can optimize and improve your brand identity over time. As your business evolves and you learn more about your target audience, shareholders, and employees, you may need to adjust your image and brand promise.

Find ways to keep up to date with shifting customer trends and tastes and constantly evaluate the company's performance in terms of public perception. This will ensure your corporate identity doesn't become outdated or out-of-touch.

Ready to build your own corporate identity?

Answering the question "what is corporate identity" might initially seem complicated. However, having a strong, consistent, and compelling identity is one of the most important things you can do to ensure you can thrive in today's competitive market.

If you need help building your own corporate identity, there are agencies and companies out there that can help. Branding

organizations can work with you to build your corporate identity guidelines from scratch with all the policies, assets, and insights you need to thrive.

Fabrik: A branding agency for our times.