



maintaining a competitive advantage

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**STEP GUIDE TO
UNDERSTANDING BRAND GUIDELINES**



Blackwood

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KNOW THEIR STRATEGIC VALUE

Brand guidelines, style manual, style guide... This crucial reference document may be called many things, but it performs one important role: to provide a set of standards for the design and creation of documents, signage and other brand-related items.

Your brand guidelines should clearly set out how to use the visual and verbal elements of your brand. They are particularly useful for graphic designers, writers and photographers, telling them everything they need to know about your brand, its elements and how to ensure they work together appropriately.

When people understand how to reproduce the different elements of your brand, your brand remains strong and consistent wherever it is seen, and the audience seeing it instantly understands what your company does, what people can expect from it and how it should be perceived.

STEP 1

Nominate an internal brand guardian

MAKE SURE YOUR GUIDELINES ‘CHAMPION’ HAS THE REMIT TO PROTECT AND PROMOTE THE BRAND IN EQUAL MEASURE.

2

COHERENCE IS KEY

Your brand guidelines are there to ensure that your organisation is presented in an effective and consistent way. As well as including guidance about your visual and verbal identity, this vital reference document should include information about your company's competitive advantages, brand messages and what sets it apart from competitors.

Your guidelines are the foundation document that external agencies and freelance suppliers will use to interpret and work with your brand. It's vital to have brand guidelines if you're likely to be commissioning a range of external and internal teams to produce work for you.

STEP 2

Share the knowledge

GIVE YOUR GUIDELINES DOCUMENT TO EVERY NEW SUPPLIER YOU WORK WITH, IF THEY WILL BE PRODUCING DESIGN-OR CONTENT-LED WORK FOR YOU. MAKE SURE THEY FULLY UNDERSTAND THE DOCUMENT, EVEN HAVING A SHORT SESSION WITH THEM TO TALK THEM THROUGH IT AND ANSWER ANY QUESTIONS.

3

COLLABORATION ENSURES SUCCESS

Your brand guidelines will involve lengthy collaboration between different parts of the business, and the external creative agency that is putting them together for you (if you don't have an in-house design team). It's important the guidelines have buy-in from key players in your business. Ultimately, though, you won't please all of the people all of the time. Guidelines must be adhered to even if the person using them doesn't agree with the principles.

Guidelines can, and should, be revisited on a regular basis - annually is a good place to start. This will keep them fresh and relevant.

STEP 3

Measure and evaluate

TEST THEM AGAINST THE WIDER MARKETPLACE EVERY YEAR. THINGS CAN CHANGE QUICKLY IN BUSINESS AND IT'S GOOD TO CHECK HOW THEY COMPARE TO YOUR COMPETITION AND IF THEY REQUIRE FURTHER DEVELOPMENT.

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BUT WOULD I EVER USE THEM?

Good brand guidelines allow a creative agency or freelance writer to produce work for you with the confidence that they're keeping to the company's visual style and verbal style (often called your tone of voice).

A clear set of guidelines should walk the supplier through the creative process, informing and supporting them.

Make them too simple and you can end up with work that's disjointed. Be too rigorous and you stifle creativity. The best guidelines allow room for creative thought while leaving the supplier clear on what they can and can't do. Try to get hold of as many examples of other company's brand guidelines for inspiration. You'll soon start to see which are useful and which are a waste of paper. You may even be able to see the result in their marketing collateral.

STEP 4

Play by your rules

GET BUY-IN FROM EVERY CREATIVE TEAM THAT YOU COMMISSION. REVISIT THEIR USE OF YOUR BRAND GUIDELINES IN PROJECT WASH UP MEETINGS. THEY MAY ALSO HAVE HELPFUL FEEDBACK ON WHAT IT'S LIKE TO USE YOUR GUIDELINES.

5

WHAT DOES GOOD LOOK LIKE?

Some companies' brand guidelines are works of art in themselves, as well as being useful documents. They provide inspiration and humour for the people using them, and help to convey the brand by 'showing' rather than 'telling'.

If you're looking for some inspiration try creativebloq.com

To work effectively brand guidelines like other policies and processes need regular review. Don't be afraid to test them and make sure they are fulfilling a useful role by working hard for your business.

Positive customer feedback, employee engagement and increased market share are three indicators that your brand works.

STEP 5

Make them work hard

INTEGRATE A REVIEW OF YOUR BRAND GUIDELINES INTO YOUR ANNUAL COMMUNICATIONS OR MARKETING PLAN.

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STEPS

READ THEM IN BLACKMAIL
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