

# The value of creative identity for early-stage business



By Byron Phillipson

27 Oct 2015

During my 20-year career working as creative director for some of the world's biggest brands, I have learned a lot about the value of a strong creative offering...

Most people think of 'creative' as pertaining specifically to channels of marketing, or functions of brand. In reality, a business's creative output is directly responsible for something much bigger: perception.

How a business is perceived, by customers and stakeholders alike, will most likely affect its potential to succeed or ultimately fail. This is an especially crucial concept to grasp for early-stage business owners.

As founder of multiple agencies over the years, I have learned that this is a difficult theory to put into practice. Startups and early-stage businesses aim to start light, and often bootstrap where possible. This means that although we may be brave enough to bite the bullet in the delicate beginnings of a company's life by wearing as many hats as possible and juggling more tasks on a daily basis than we should, we become all-consumed with so many 'critical' issues (managing budgets, developing product and services), that we barely have time to give attention to what *seems* to be the softer issue of our creative output. As testament to this, I recall getting my first digital agency's website up and running only 11 months into our first year...



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Added to this, there is quite often the fear or misunderstanding of the creative process by early-stage business owners that do not launch with a 'creative' member or team.

Here's a myth I would like to dispel: You don't need to be a designer or know Photoshop to produce a strong creative output for your business. There is a lot of work that can be done upfront that doesn't require a single stitch of pixel-pushing skill or ability.

Here's some advice that I would like to put forward to all early-stage business owners before even looking at "getting that logo done".

## **The four pillars of creative communication for your business**

### **1. Start with the basics**

You will have to get to know your business. By this I don't mean the workings of your business, but rather the qualitative nature of your business. A good place to start would be with your vision and mission statements. By crafting these two pieces, you are essentially creating the DNA of your brand's personality, as well as the building blocks for a strong and clear vision of how you would like your brand to be perceived. Every piece of creative output that follows from here should communicate these qualitative characteristics.

### **2. Pick a colour**

This step might sound overly simplistic, but in truth, this is very often the first step that a creative will take when developing an identity for a brand. Once you have a good understanding of the business's personality and values, you will be in a good position to do this. As human beings, one of the first visual qualities we relate to in any physical engagement is colour. Defining what colours best represent your business or brand doesn't require much more than a few minutes of research online into the psychological properties of colour, and a little bit of intuition.

### **3. Give it a voice**

Once again, by looking at the qualities you have defined for your business personality, you should have a good sense of the kind of message you would expect the brand to communicate. But, equally as important as what your brand says, is how it says it. By simply aligning the tone of message to the brand's personality, you ensure that all creative writing and communications are painting the perfect picture of your business. This is called a 'Tone Guide' and will go a long way in any future briefs you may want to pass on to a creative agency.

### **4. Consider the experience**

Empathy. We all have it to some degree or another. By putting yourself in someone else's shoes, you are able to hone this sense of empathy. Consider how you would feel when experiencing what it is that your business has to offer. In my field of digital marketing and product design, we call this practice 'User Experience'. We have many complex models and tools that we implore to ensure that we have considered all the variables of the experience across many different user personas. We do this because we understand the weight and importance of defining an experience before we begin any design work. You can cultivate your vision of the nature of the experience you would like your customer to have by exercising your sense of empathy.

If you can manage to give your business this kind of creative care and nurture as early in your businesses life as possible, you can be sure that the way in which your business is perceived will always be clear and true.

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