



# Seven steps to a successful visual identity



## The identity in question.

Creating your own brand is both exciting and confusing. You don't always know where to start but you usually know that you need a name and a logo. Then, you start hearing about things like visual identity, branding and brand message and everything just becomes a blur.

People tend to reduce the visual identity of a brand to its logo but, although it is part of it, it's actually only the tip of the iceberg.

With my clients, I often use the example of a beautiful person who has impeccable style but zero personality. They might catch your eye but you'll quickly realize it's all there is to it. This person doesn't have much to say and you end up disappointed. The same goes when it comes to the identity of a brand. You want it to be beautiful and well-conceived, but you also want it to have a personality. A brand should add value to its customers' lives and evolve with the times.

In short, a visual identity is composed of several concrete elements and others that are a little more abstract. Here are seven steps I would like you to take in order to build a successful visual brand identity.



# 1. The vision

Whether you have a revolutionary idea that is going to change the world or you simply want to replicate a business model that has already been proven to work, you have probably already imagined yourself victim of your success. Like in a movie when we see the hero-entrepreneur working through the seasons at the rhythm of an upbeat three-minute montage that ultimately ends with applause and a seat on top of the world.

Unfortunately, it doesn't exactly play out like that in real life. There are ups and downs and that's why determining the vision you have for your business right from the start is important. This is important for you, but it is also very important in order to determine the identity of your brand. It is this vision that will set the tone and that will push you forward in moments of doubt.

The good news is that this vision does not have to be spectacular. If you have an innovative product that has the ability to change the world, congratulations! Like Elon Musk, you can aim farther than the Moon and decide to go to Mars or even Jupiter. However, if your idea is more down to earth (down-to-earth, get it?!), it will be necessary to adapt your vision to your project.

Examples :

*-I want to become financially independent and work from home to see my children more often.\**

*- I want to contribute to decreasing the impact my town has on the environment.*

*\* A vision can be self-centered and personal.*

## 2. The mission

*"Bring inspiration and innovation to every athlete\* in the world. \*If you have a body, you are an athlete."*  
That's Nike's mission.

After defining the vision you have for your business, you need to set a clear mission for your brand. Make this mission as simple as possible so that the message is clear and concise. This step will also help you define your audience a little better.

Of course, in the beginning, not everyone has Nike's budget or talents to serve everyone on the planet. That's why, when writing your mission statement, it's important to jump straight to the point. Using a few words, clearly define the reason why you are creating your brand and for whom it is designed. Be realistic but stay inspired.

Examples :

- Ikea : *"To create a better everyday life for the many people."*

- Tesla : *"To accelerate the world's transition to sustainable energy."*



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### 3. The name

It goes without saying that your brand is going to need a name. There are several ways to find a name and, if you don't feel creative, there are also several tools available on the internet to give you some ideas.

The name you choose will be more or less important depending on the market or platform on which you decide to position your brand. For example, the issue is less important when you name an Amazon shop because consumers come to Amazon for the products rather than the individual stores. But since we are talking about creating a brand with a capital "B", I'll assume that the name of your brand is important both in terms of significance **and** visual appeal.

When deciding on the name of your brand, try to think of the number of letters and words that makes it. This will make sense when creating your logo. Because, yes, not all words or sets of words have the same graphic value. From a graphic design point of view, we don't treat an *Yves Saint Laurent* (three words and sixteen letters) the same way we do an *Apple* (one word and five letters).



## 4. The logo

Often confused with the overall visual identity and, as important as it can be, a logo is in reality only one of the elements that make up the identity of a brand. You can consider it as one of the many extensions of both the vision and mission of the brand.

The graphic style of the logo will give an indication of the kind of service/product you offer. It can take the form of a graphic element like an apple for Apple or a swoosh for Nike, but it can also be composed of a single typographic element.

If the name of your brand is on the longer side, you'll need a secondary logo for smaller formats (think social media profile picture, app icon, favicon, etc.). If your logo is composed of an icon and text, you will need to anticipate and prepare all the possible versions (icon + text / text only / icon alone etc.).



## 5. The colours

Choosing a colour palette is essential when creating a visual identity. In this palette must appear: the colour(s) of the logo but also any secondary or tertiary colour that will become part of the global identity. By determining a simple colour range, your communication will look and feel more consistent and professional. But be careful not to use too many of them! Choose four to five colours max: one main colour, two neutral colours, one accent colour (to emphasize certain elements) and a dark colour (grey level).

If you need a little help with that, you can use [Adobe Kuler](#) or search for "color palette" on Pinterest, you'll find many good examples and ideas.

## 6. Typography

On the web or in print, typography is omnipresent, so don't neglect it. I advise never to use more than three different typefaces (fonts) on the same document. To avoid any error, I suggest you even choose only two. Choose one for titles and subtitles and another for body text. By limiting yourself, your message will be easier to read.

Remember: *Less is more.*







## 7. Photography

Whether you're selling a physical product or a service, you will need visuals that match the image of your brand. In the age of social media and content farms, many businesses use the same stock photo services. Needless to say that this goes against the very idea of building a visual identity that stands out from the crowd. To avoid this pitfall, you can take your own photos if you feel like you could do a good job or contact a photographer if you can afford it. If those two options don't work for you, you can use websites like *Unsplash* that offer a great range of free, high-quality stock photos; or even *Stocksy* (paid). You might see other companies using the same photos but at least you'll have good photos.

Those services are great for blog and social media content; and also to give a nice mood to your website. For your product photography (if you're selling physical objects) however, you will have to think about the style in which you want to showcase your products. You'll usually need **two types of photos**: packshots (your product on a white or plain background) and lifestyle shots (your product in a more natural environment).

The main lesson here is **visual coherence**. Determine the photographic style of your brand and stick to it.



## About the author

Awatif Bentahar is a designer and art director who specializes in brand design and visual communication. She was trained in Graphic Design at the Central Saint Martins school of Design in London and returned to Paris in 2013. In Paris, she worked for various start-ups on projects including cosmetics, fashion, food and lifestyle brands such as Elie Saab, Repetto, Marc Jacobs Beauty, Ralph Lauren or Kellogg's to name a few. In 2016, she helped create Prescription Lab, the first 100% digital French beauty brand. In 2018, she went on to launch New Public, her own creative studio. Today, she helps entrepreneurs and start-ups in the creation and conceptualization of their visual identity. She also consults on various issues related to branding and visual communication.

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