Brand Principles

How to be a 21st Century Brand

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The Premise

Is your business a brand?

Think about it for a minute. This might sound like a simple question. You might even think it's a stupid one. But how would you answer it? You see, I've asked this question many times—to a variety of business leaders—and the response I get usually leaves me frustrated, because most of the time the immediate answer is an emphatic "*yes!*"

Let me explain.

In my design practice, I've encountered numerous businesses and start-ups who considered themselves brands—some of whom had yet to deliver a product or a service to the market. I've run branding sessions in start-up incubators and accelerators where, at the beginning of the session when I ask: "Is your business a brand?" most hands shoot up immediately. But by the end of the session—which covers the ideas in this book—few, if any, hands go up in response to the same question because they realise their claim is premature. They acknowledge their understanding has been based solely on a business idea they have yet to develop or mature and where the term 'brand' had perhaps offered a sense of immediate credibility. However, in most instances, they had equated their logo as being their brand. But this isn't limited to start-ups. Many established businesses also consider themselves as being a brand—regardless of whether or not they actually are. Why is this the case? What's going on? And, as we collectively face so many global challenges, why is being a brand even important? Well, let's start with some context.

While some brands have become almost universally recognised and valued, there are worrying indicators in the fields of design and business that suggest a deeper understanding of what it truly means to be a brand is required. The objective of this book is to provide practical guidance and advice to help businesses navigate some of these issues and to present a case for why it's important to address them.

To start, the word brand is often used to signify a 'type of thing' or a 'label for something'. For example: "I like that brand of coffee", which suggests a type of coffee. As opposed to, "I like that coffee brand", which identifies a distinct coffee-producing company, rather than a general type of coffee. Yet, when it comes to a commercial understanding of brands we enter into a very specific activity, one that is deliberately designed to differentiate a particular business and associate it with a set of clear Values, behaviours and value propositions. This is a much deeper, and a far more nuanced exercise. Or at least it should be.

Unfortunately, the commercial understanding of 'brand' has been steadily diluted, partly due to the fact it's regularly used as a substitute for the word 'business' (and any business will do). Compounding this, it's also becoming common practice to refer to logos as brands. (Here again, any logo will do.) And designers aren't helping things, either. Often, when visiting graphic design websites, it's not unusual to encounter a page featuring the heading 'Our Brands' sitting proudly above a selection of logos, identities, or work samples. However, this is a misrepresentation, because such a pronouncement openly assumes authority and ownership over someone else's business.

Obviously, designers can, and should, rightfully claim credit for developing the design, and much of the thinking involved with it. But this shouldn't translate into declaring ownership of an entire business or brand. Nor is the logo and its application a full reflection of them. At best, this assertion reduces the nuances of a brand down to a selection of communication items or, at worst, to a singular logo developed at a specific point in time. All this contributes to a superficial and misguided understanding of a brand—but also what it takes to develop and build one. This is problematic because it has the potential to mislead business owners (unintentionally, or not) and negatively influence their expectations and future impact as a result. It's bewildering why some designers propagate it so blatantly. But it goes even further.

My personal frustration increases when branding agencies, brand architects, brand consultants, brand designers, Design Thinkers, or any number of brand 'experts' suggest (with enthusiasm) that they can *create* or *build* a brand for you. Of course, I understand why a design firm would want to position themselves in this way, but their claim of "brand building" is not only disingenuous—it's dangerous. Now, you might think that sounds overly dramatic. You might be wondering: Is it really that dangerous?; Why does it matter?; Is it simply a case of semantics? You might even be a designer and have already labelled me a heretic, someone determined to chastise our industry for commercially strategic purposes. Regardless, the truth is, designers aren't in a position to build a brand on someone's behalf. Believing otherwise is the first step in misunderstanding how a brand is developed and what a brand actually is.

While there are exceptions, for the majority of instances a brand must come from the business itself—and it must be delivered, acted upon and lived up to every day. It's not an easy, quick or passive exercise. Nor is it something you can simply outsource. If you are serious about developing a brand, most of the long-term, heavy lifting and ongoing work required to build your brand must be done by you—and your entire staff—because it's your business. That's what makes it so powerful. Of course, your customers and society also play a critical role in building your brand, but more on this later.

Why can't external consultants build your brand?
Think about it. An external consultant simply can't develop or build your brand if they 'leave the building' once the marketing project has been completed. Once they've moved on to their next client engagement, they aren't focused on you anymore. They're not attending your regular business strategy meetings, or your product development sessions, where all the significant decisions are being made. And they're not regularly engaging with your customers, either. More to the point—as we'll discuss in Chapter 2—just because you have a business, this doesn't automatically mean you have a brand, least of all because an external consultant says you do as a result of a marketing exercise.

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This is further complicated by the word 'branding' because of its association with the word 'brand'. In fact, it increases confusion and misrepresentation even more. So, to help clear things up, Chapter 1 presents some definitions to distinguish between *brand* and *branding*. But before that, let's acknowledge an important reality: an external consultant or firm has probably provided critical strategic advice on how to position your business, along with a suite of tools, frameworks, templates, logos, communication platforms, etc, to appropriately reflect your position in the market. If done well, all this is incredibly important—and immensely valuable— because it provides the building blocks and the focus to successfully articulate and communicate your business moving forward. This is where designers are useful and vital in co-creating a direction for the business with clarity and impact. But the designer isn't in a position to implement this every day. They don't have the resources, commitment or remuneration to adjust and/or leverage where needed, as business contexts change and shift over time. It's the business itself, and all its staff, that can react and respond, develop and evolve the business over the long-term. In fact, they're required to do so when building a brand—not the external designers or consultants.

A few exceptions
While branding designers and external consultants can't build your brand for you, there are three instances where designers actually are in a position to *help* build a brand:

1. *When they're long-term strategic partners*, actively involved with influencing strategy, planning, product development, processes and systems, HR and recruitment, Research & Development, customer service, and communications decisions in an ongoing manner, while regularly engaging with the Executive and Board. In some instances, the designer may also have equity in the business, which obviously increases their direct investment in the overall success of the venture.

2. *When they're the founder and/or owner,* working in the business on a daily basis, developing and helping to deliver the service or customer offer. Obviously—as a business owner who happens to be a designer—they can leverage their design skills, experience and understanding to further position the business with more efficiency. But it's a long-term, whole-of-organisation-effort, not a short-term external engagement.

3. *When they're working in-house* and in a position to contribute, challenge and shape the company as it grows and evolves. However, this often depends on the designer's seniority, whether they have influence in how the business operates, and how much the Executive and Board values design. While business leaders are increasingly seeing the tangible value designers can bring to the broader development of a business, unfortunately not all businesses are design-led and this often dilutes the designers' input, excluding them from critical decisions.

So, what's involved?

We often hear success stories of brands who appear to have emerged almost seamlessly. We observe the good fortune of familiar brands who seem to effortlessly capture the market and captivate customers. For a business owner working immensely hard to reach similar heights it can be difficult to see a pathway towards achieving this goal. However, for all those success stories, we rarely get a picture of the hurdles those brands had to overcome, or what effort and steps they had to undertake behind the scenes in order to achieve their eventual success. Perhaps we think they had a great marketing strategy, or a compelling advertising campaign. Maybe we think they were lucky and hit a particular vein with a product or service that resonated with the market. For everyone else trying to do this, it can be hard grind. And while luck might have played a role in the success of a business or brand, leveraging and maintaining what that luck provided still requires a lot of work.

Even the most successful brands have to work continuously at building and maintaining their brand. Seemingly successful brands can, and have, been deeply damaged almost overnight when their value proposition has missed the mark, or their customer experience hasn't lived up to their promise, or if the brand simply lied to the market and were exposed. (Think *Enron's* deceit, *BP's* Mexican Gulf oil spill crisis, *Facebook's Cambridge Analytica* scandal, *Starbucks'* racism debacle, *Volkswagen Group's* 'dieselgate' disaster, and various luxury brand's *Blackface* missteps, to name a few). As more brands emerge all over the world there is increasing competition to secure a share of the pie. The question is, how do you navigate this?

Unfortunately, we can never know all the backstories to all the successful brands that we're familiar with. And while there are numerous worthy books in circulation focusing on various aspects of brands and branding—many of which are great resources—a lot of them mainly focus on the outcomes rather than the process or principles behind them. Additionally, although case studies can be insightful on many levels, it's often difficult to apply those particular outcomes (which worked for a specific company in specific circumstances) to your own business, particularly if you're in a different category or segment—and operating at a different scale. In contrast, this book takes an alternative approach by focusing on the process and mindset involved in building a brand, based on 15 tried-and-tested principles, observed and developed over my nearly 30-year career in design and branding. It uses common language to encourage a mindset you can adopt in your own way, and which can be applied to any business, regardless of size or sector.

Let's begin...

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Brand vs Branding
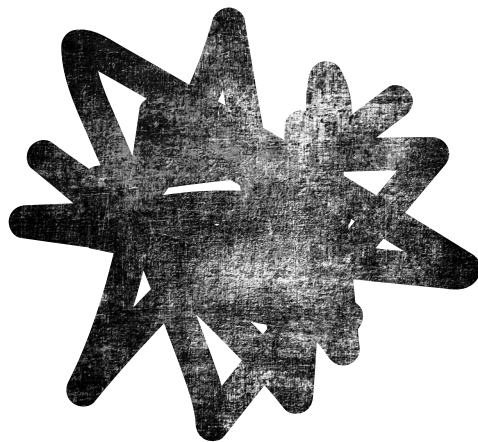
The term 'brand' is so overused (and increasingly misunderstood), its value and meaning is being eroded. It's now common to hear how companies have rebranded— particularly high-profile companies—but this is often misleading. Many of them have simply updated, revised, tweaked or changed their logo, while everything else remains the same and business-as-usual continues. In fact, most of them have simply engaged in what is referred to as an *identity refresh*.

If they were to truly *rebrand*, it would usually involve developing an alternative company name, a revised business strategy and a new core focus for the company, with an entirely new promise or offer to customers, which is a very serious undertaking. While an *identity refresh* can be an effective exercise on some levels, it's not a rebrand—even though it might currently be fashionable to refer to it as such. Regardless, there are many reasons for the confusion between *brand* and *branding* and it largely depends on who you talk to, their experiences with brands or branding and, of course, the context. With that in mind, it's vitally important to first clarify the definitions we'll be using for this book:

A *brand* is who you are, how you're perceived and how people *feel* about your business. It's the core value of your business offer, and a promise to your customers of the value they should expect. It is the sum of all the experiences someone has with your business. It's what you live and deliver every day. It cannot be manufactured, created or invented by an external consultant (because then you'll be required to live up to someone else's vision, rather than your own).

Branding is how you articulate and appropriately communicate your business—to your customers, and to the world—across a variety of channels. (This is where designers are useful.)

The distinction between *brand* and *branding* is important because outsourcing or handing over the process of 'building your brand' to an external party—who is *not* involved in your business every

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Effective branding makes you visible; it makes you understood, recognised and, in the best-case scenario, it can help *foster* trust.

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day—makes it near impossible to achieve the desired outcome over the long haul and in a sustained manner. Essentially, you'll have relinquished accountability, placing the future perception of your business in the hands of someone external, based on their limited understanding of your business, ignoring their distance from any ongoing activity *in* the business, and solely reliant on a suite of marketing tools provided from *outside* the business. That said, when articulating and communicating your business, a designer's role is significant because they will question everything you assume about your company—or at least they should. They can help interrogate assumptions and uncover truths. In doing so, they can identify perceptions, internally and externally, which is incredibly important because—as we all know—perception is more powerful than truth. So, being aware of perceptions is essential in understanding how your business is *positioned in the minds of others.*

While all that work is vital in facilitating an independent and objective understanding of your business, the designers themselves don't live, breathe and champion it every day. They simply can't. It's difficult for them to have a long-term investment in your company beyond the terms of their engagement. Regardless, effective branding makes you visible; it makes you understood, recognised and, in the best-case scenario, it can help *foster* trust. All of this is essential in building a brand because, if it's done well, branding articulates your value proposition and attracts customers and staff who are willing to engage with your business. It provides clarity and focus—internally and externally.

Yet it also exposes you because you cannot hide from what you communicate to the world. Whether you like it or not, you will be expected to live up to your claims, one way or another. And there can be serious consequences for promising something that you don't—or can't—actually deliver on. If branding isn't done properly, and with due consideration, the result will most likely be arbitrary, purely aesthetic, and potentially superficial. Or worse: it will be disconnected from your business, or will simply be dishonest.

And this is how you will eventually be perceived. That's why it's critical to fully understand and distinguish between whether you're engaging in a *branding* exercise (which influences, communicates and reflects your entire organisation), or a *logo* design (which is essentially a badge for your business).

The designer's role

In a conversation with Ken Segall (ex-advertising Creative Director for *Apple*, and someone who worked closely with Steve Jobs for 12 years) I raised my concern about external consultants claiming to create or build brands on behalf of their clients. He sums up how advertising and design have *helped* position *Apple*:

"I do think that maybe I've been fortunate to have worked with brands that actually value their agency's input. Some more than others, of course. But I think we [advertising creatives] always considered ourselves as the steward of the brand because our advertising was the most visible thing they did. But, obviously, the brand is more than just the advertising. It's PR and all the things that the company does and which add up to what the brand is. But I think the agencies have a lot to say about that, and in the case of Apple maybe it was an unusual case because Steve Jobs loved marketing so much. He loved and understood the power of the brand. Many of our conversations were about that kind of stuff, whereas other companies might not treat their agency that way.

"We saw ourselves as being important and knew the advertising we put out really was going to shape the brand so it had to be consistent with the Values, the level of creativity—all of that. A good advertising/marketing person needs to be extremely aware of what they're doing to the brand work because you are a major contributor to what the brand is." [1]

The immense value of a business working collaboratively with external creatives—and focusing on how every element in the business contributes to building the brand—cannot be overstated. It also illustrates how visibility, consistency and communication, all of which design and advertising can facilitate, contributes towards positioning the brand in specific ways that both align with the brand but also help shape perceptions around it. But it's important to acknowledge that this was possible for Segall because he worked closely with Jobs and *Apple* over a 12-year period, and that Jobs both understood and valued design and brand. This proximity allowed Segall to align *Apple's* Values, approaches and philosophies across numerous communication touch-points in a consistent manner and in a way that reflected the evolution of the brand during that time. But, as Segall states, these activities alone do not build a brand. Nonetheless, their contribution is significant in helping to raise awareness, in making a business familiar and understood, and in shaping perceptions and expectations which, in *Apple's* case, could be delivered upon.

Of course, *Apple* is a massive corporation. However, the process involved in building and maintaining their brand can be applied to other businesses. That process requires close collaboration with design and marketing to communicate and convey—with consistency—every aspect of a business that's working hard to deliver value to customers, and which understands the importance of absolute clarity inside the organisation. But it's still only part of what is involved in building a brand. This takes time and rarely starts at the launch of a business, so let's investigate this further.

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1. *The transformative power of simplicity,* Ken Segall in conversation with Kevin Finn for DESIGNerd, online article, March 2018.

Business ≠ Brand
Brand = Business

It's vital to fully understand that a brand takes time to build. It takes context and awareness, and it takes constant evolution. It's not a *brand* at inception—it's a *business*; and that's an important distinction to acknowledge. Unfortunately, it seems to be routinely disregarded.

Just because a business has a logo, a website, perhaps a bricks-and-mortar presence and some customers, does not automatically make that business a *brand*. While it might be a *type of business*, it takes time and effort to build a brand: to earn trust; to become loved, familiar and accepted within a wide or niche community; to establish a tangible difference from competitors and to consistently deliver on the promise it makes to customers; and to build a culture that acts and behaves in a specific way. It takes time and effort to articulate and execute a value proposition in real terms. It takes context—and it takes influence—to command the term 'brand'. All of this is hard-earned. It requires investment and commitment to maintain and evolve. And it rarely happens at the inception of a business. Of course, it's no surprise that businesses want to equate themselves with being a 'brand' because of the status this label conveys. But simply adopting the term 'brand' for these reasons shows a deep lack of understanding for what it means—and for what it takes to achieve. In a frank conversation with Dutch-native Anne Miltenburg (founder of educational organisation *Brand The Change* and then Brand Lead at *Internet of Elephants*, an innovative conservation initiative based in Nairobi, Kenya) she confirmed this fact:

"I see a brands as people, movements, companies or causes that have achieved a certain amount of prominence in the minds of their audience. If I consider how much time we invested at Internet of Elephants to get to that place of prominence, we realised early on that without any serious marketing budget we were going to have to earn that place on our own steam. We decided to open up our product development process to the public, involving them at every stage over the course of two years. People joined in testing,

ideation, hackathons, and crowdfunding. We invested a lot of time in storytelling, talks at industry events, as well as videos; we built relationships with journalists interested in innovation in the environmental space and provided them with unique stories; we wrote thought-leadership pieces for renowned media; we also created partnerships with credible organisations in the conservation space to show [that while] we are a tiny, young company, we have an established audience base and press networks and should be taken seriously. It's been a few years now and we're beginning to harvest some results. We became one of Fast Company's 2018 most innovative companies, we were awarded a National Geographic Explorer Grant and we received some good press in Tech Crunch, on CNN and BBC. When we encounter people in the conservation space today, they often already know us and admire our work—which is good evidence that there's some brand awareness; that the brand is starting to do some of the heavy lifting for us. But that took three years! It's not like: "Oh, we built something, we launch it, people will love it, they will tell each other all about how great it is, and all this will just spread based on its own merit."

"[Laughs] There's a myth that: If you build it, they will come. But it's just not true for 99.9 percent of us. Instead, we're going to have to build the brand one person at a time." [1]

Wanting to become a brand is an understandable and justifiable aspiration but, in many ways, it's actually customers and the community who decide which businesses are brands, and which are not, based on how they feel about the company, how relevant it is in their lives, as well as the level, status and value it provides to them. But the notions of *'brand'* and *'branding'* have been conflated over recent decades. They've been used with abandon in discussions and debates about business, and have become interchangeable in the celebration and criticism of newly designed 'logos' (also referred to as 'identities'). Similarly, the terms 'brand'

and 'business' have also been conflated. Of course, there are many reasons for this. Part of the problem is due to the increased success and awareness of big brands in mainstream culture, but it's also due to the ambitions of business owners who aspire to achieve similar success. This has resulted in people adopting the term 'brand' as a replacement for the word 'business.' Why? The likelihood is that 'brand' simply conveys a sense of prestige and greater value. And brands are big business.

Awareness and recognition

There is yet another factor to consider. The reality is, we do associate *brands* with *logos*. Think of any brand and you're likely to summon a visual picture of that company—and it's usually their logo or symbol. Why? The logo is often the shorthand identifier for multiple associations we have with an organisation, allowing us to immediately distill these associations in unison through a recognisable 'mark'. That means we regularly associate everything we know and feel about a company with the logo that represents it, making it a vital element of branding. This symbol identifies the consistency, quality and status we've come to understand and expect from that particular company. And in an increasingly crowded market, it's a clear visual shorthand that cuts through the noise.

Consider when you're looking for something to eat in an unfamiliar country. You may scan the streetscape searching for a logo or symbol that denotes a restaurant, supermarket chain or eatery you recognise and are therefore comfortable with—perhaps *Starbucks, Panda Express, Matsuya, Subway or McDonald's.* The same could be said when you are shopping on an unfamiliar high-street, looking for logos that represent your favourite shops or stores. At a glance, people immediately recognise specific traits in branding, which they're familiar with because a logo or symbol has the ability to say so much, with so little—yet so quickly—*because of the associations built into it over time.* And that's an immensely valuable asset to any business.

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1. *Branding for change (part 2),* Anne Miltenburg in conversation with Kevin Finn for DESIGNerd, online article, April 2018. Slightly revised in 2022 by Anne Miltenburg.

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The logo is the symbol of a brand; it's not the brand in isolation, because context matters. And in more commercial terms, the logo doesn't make the brand—*the brand gives the logo its value.*

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At a more granular level, these logos, symbols and identities are elements that we are increasingly engaging with on a daily basis, particularly through our smartphones, where App buttons often feature an organisation's logo. We regularly search for—and recognise—what we're looking for in a quick, confident way. And we literally touch them. These logos have become familiar (digital) doorways to brands and businesses—with whom we seek specific products and services, and which we've come to recognise, understand, expect, and trust. Again, this takes time and effort to achieve. But that doesn't make it any less sought-after or less valuable. Quite the opposite. The more meaning embedded in a logo, the more valuable it becomes. Michael Bierut (New York Partner at the acclaimed international design firm *Pentagram*) has spent a successful career creating—and investigating—high-profile branding and shared his expert opinion with me:

"I've spent a lot of time trying to figure out how something like the Target logo, or the Nike 'swoosh' works. I've certainly encountered enough clients who seem to want the Nike swoosh logo and I've thought: "OK, what is it that they want?" You can say dismissively: "Oh, these poor fools want me to give them a logo that mysteriously already has millions of dollars invested in it, something as powerful as the Nike swoosh". Still, if you want something that will work that way, how do you do it? To me, a lot of it has to do with the way it appears at the moment of its inception. It isn't necessarily the way it's going to be fated to live in the world and how it plays out. And more frustratingly, you can't actually predict or control exactly how it's going to play out, right? You have to be able to accept that, particularly when it comes to identity design." [2]

He went on to say:

"The Target logo is the most boring thing in the world. And the Nike swoosh, it didn't even quite mean anything in the very beginning, you know? But, in both those cases and for decades, they provided a

2. *How to approach design,* Michael Bierut in conversation with Kevin Finn for Open Manifesto, Issue #8: Change, 2017, page 78.
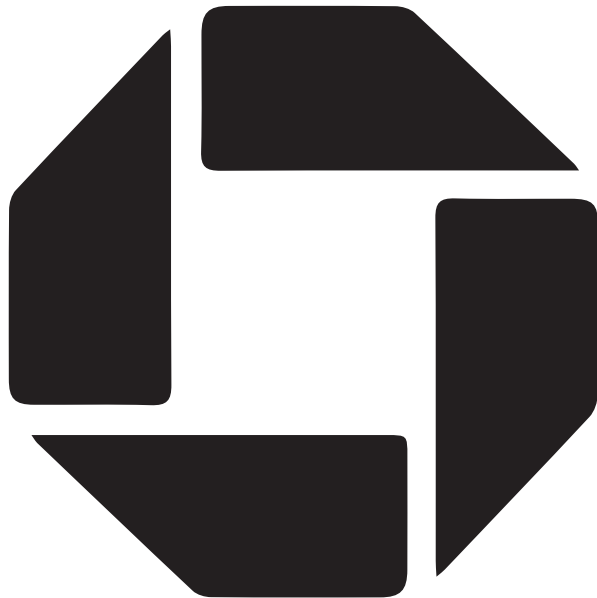
canvas for creative ingenuity in the way that they were manipulated and their meaning was permitted to expand." [3]

In short, the logo is the symbol of a brand; it's not the brand in isolation, because context matters. And in more commercial terms, the logo doesn't make the brand—*the brand gives the logo its value.* Why are these important distinctions? Because, regardless of any initial design rationale, branding adopts meaning over time as it becomes understood as the shorthand interpretation of what that business stands for, what it believes in, how it behaves—and how it is *perceived in the minds of others.* Elements of this meaning might be present at inception—depending on media, marketing and any broader awareness—but this will inevitably mature and evolve over time as it becomes tangible in the minds of individuals (i.e. staff, customers, and society at large). This only becomes evident as people engage with the business and begin to rationalise their experiences into a series of specific associations. While businesses might have the ability to *influence* how they're perceived, the fact is, how people genuinely think about a business dictates how perception is shaped—and whether that perception actually translates into being a brand.

Logos as a canvas
As Bierut points out, logos provide a canvas for meaning over time. In some cases, they can be incredibly literal, for example the *Target* icon. In other cases, logos can be abstract or even downright weird. Obviously, there are numerous ways a logo or an identity design can be approached, and there are just as many reasons for why they look a certain way. However, for most logos and branding, whatever wider or deeper meaning we associate with a symbol will depend on our experiences, or our awareness, of the organisation in question— and this is constantly evolving. So, let's do a little experiment.

Do you recognise the symbol on the opposite page?

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3.   *How to approach design,* page 87.

Many readers will immediately know it as the symbol for *Chase Manhattan Bank*. But, do you know what the symbol means? Do you know what the symbol itself represents? Perhaps that's not as easy to answer. The origin of this particular symbol is interesting and it's a great example of how branding, identities and symbols have meaning embedded within them over time. In this case, it all began with a business merger. According to the designer, Tom Geismar, co-founder of one of America's most historic design firms *Chermayeff & Geismar*:

"When Chase National Bank merged with the Bank of the Manhattan Company to create Chase Manhattan Bank, the new company became the second largest in the United States. The new organisation needed a new graphic identity to represent it effectively... Banks at that time generally used trademarks that grew from their initials or an image of the bank's headquarters building. Chase Manhattan briefly used an awkward combination of a map of the United States, a representation of the globe, the name of the bank, and the phrase 'world-wide banking'. We became convinced that the bank would benefit from a simple symbol that could not only unite the two newly merged corporate cultures but also come to stand in for the company's long, unwieldy name in the public mind. However, there is no symbol that really means banking, and no symbol that represented Chase. We turned to the idea of using an abstract symbol, since we knew that Chase Manhattan had tremendous advertising resources that could quickly establish the symbol in the public mind." [4]

So, the icon meant very little at the beginning—at least nothing tangible. Instead, it was a deliberate open canvas allowing it to adopt meaning over time through customer experiences, extensive advertising and promotion, and numerous associations over decades that became embedded within the meaning of the symbol, and in the minds of the public. Of course, the specific design of the icon became a significant contributing factor in facilitating all of this to occur.

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4.   *From Mobil to Chase Bank, 6 Iconic Logos and How They Came to Be,* Steven Heller, The Atlantic, online article, 8 December 2011.

So, let's try another example, from a completely different industry sector. Do you recognise the logo on the previous page? Some readers might know it as *Canterbury*, a New Zealand clothing company established in 1904 in Canterbury, on New Zealand's South Island. In the early years of the company, it was called upon to make hard-wearing uniforms for the New Zealand and Australian armies during the First World War, and it then became synonymous with sportswear, particularly for producing official clothing for the *All Blacks*, New Zealand's national rugby powerhouse. But what about the logo? According to the *Canterbury* website:

"John Lane, Pringle Walker and Alfred Rudkin were English natives turned proud Kiwis [a term of reference for New Zealanders]. Such was their love for their adopted homeland, they named their company after the area in which they settled—Canterbury. From its very beginnings, this was a brand rooted in the New Zealand soil. Like the Kiwi landscape itself, it was rugged and uncompromising. When the time came to give the company a logo, the founders naturally chose three kiwis [a flightless bird native to New Zealand and a national emblem]."

There are lots of literal visual, historic and cultural references the founders could have adopted for the logo. However, they kept it simple, local and to the point—*the Kiwi bird*. The company was originally called *Canterbury Clothing Company* so the logo was developed from the silhouettes of three Kiwi birds creating the letters CCC, which also represented the three founders. However, little of this is evident from looking at the logo—other than the Kiwi bird silhouette, and of course that's not necessarily an internationally recognised bird. However, over time the *Canterbury* logo has become deeply associated with sports and their tagline— *Committed To The Game*—has cemented this association even further. Here again, the logo has become a canvas for meaning to be embedded over time, evolving the messaging and associations as contexts shift, as the business adapts, and as various perceptions are formed in the minds of others.

The business of brand

Now, I know it's easy to get caught up in the technical jargon and lingo involved in branding. In fact, I'm convinced this just adds to the confusion and/or dismissal of these terms. But there is a critical distinction between how a business might consider developing its logo versus how it might approach *building a brand*. The late and legendary branding guru Wally Olins (co-founder of the influential and seminal branding firm *Wolff Olins* and, later in his career, *Saffron*), once shared with me his insightful opinions around this topic:

"Brand identity and corporate identity and reputation—all of these words—stand for the same kinds of things. But there is no doubt, though, that the semantic difference between brand identity and corporate identity is profound. 'Corporate identity' is an academic, almost loose woolly term, whereas a 'Brand' is about money. So when you start talking about a brand you start talking about a subject that is very close to a corporation's real interests... When you talk to a commercial organisation about brand strategy they know that it is about money and is therefore worth talking about. The long-term implication is that it puts brand strategists and brand consultants right at the heart of the business world. Corporate identity does not do this." [5]

So, the difference between *corporate identity* and *brand* equates to the difference between what a business *looks like* (identity), and what a business *is* (in its entirety), including how it delivers value (what customers are willing to pay for). Those are all inextricably linked, since the symbols and logos facilitate another cultural aspect of brands and branding—*belonging*. Olins expands on the significance of this:

"Branding is at the heart of today's society simply because branding is about manifestations of identity. It's a demonstration of who and what

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5.   *Branding is the greatest gift that commerce has given to culture,* Wally Olins in conversation with Kevin Finn for Open Manifesto, Issue #5: Identity, 2009, page 25.

you belong to, and in a world that is increasingly competitive this is important, not just in commercial life but in every kind of activity you can think of including sport, the Nation, the city, the family. Inevitably then, what brand you choose to belong to, what brand you choose to associate yourself with is of profound significance." [6]

Apple, one of the most valuable companies in the world, is often cited as an example of a successful brand (and successful branding) fostering a tribe of loyal customers, bordering on what some might describe as religious. However, *Apple* is unique in many ways so it's disproportionate to compare it to most businesses. Yet, it's regularly referred to as the 'holy grail', because of its visibility and having become (for plenty of people) the pinnacle of commercial aspiration—and the envy of many business owners. Ken Segall reminds us how this was achieved:

"In my advertising consulting life—either through my own experiences or people I know who tell me—clients have said: 'We want to do something like what Apple would do.' Because, again, there is a perception that it looks simple, so people think it is. And this feeds the perception that Apple achieved it overnight. But it was over 20 years—doing it over and over and over again, building loyalty among people who appreciate a company that makes wonderful things simple." [7]

This alone is testament to the fact that it takes time and constant effort, not only to establish a brand, but to then build it and sustain it over the long-term. Simply willing your business to be a brand is not enough. And believing your business is a brand, due to a branding exercise or program, falls well short of the mark.

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6. *Branding is the greatest gift that commerce has given to culture,* page 25.
7. *The transformative power of simplicity,* Ken Segall in conversation with Kevin Finn for DESIGNerd, online article, March 2018.

How can you tell if *your* business is a brand?

Perhaps you're already referring to your business as a brand. And perhaps that's warranted. But if you're unsure, it's worth assessing whether customers, the market and society (in general) consider your business as being truly a category leader—perhaps the one which most other competitors are measured against; that your Purpose and value propositions are clearly articulated and fully understood, both internally and externally; that you're known amongst customers for specific reasons (whether in a niche or a broad market); and that the majority of associations that people make about your business are consistent with your own views and aspirations. How can you do this? Simply by asking people—your staff, customers, suppliers, partners, investors, etc. However, the type of questions you ask are important; they need to be value-based, for example:

— *What genuinely sets us apart from others, and why?*
— *What specifically comes to mind when you think of our business, and why?*
— *What value do we provide in your life: how and why?*
— *How visible and understood are we in the market, and why?*
— *What's the top-of-mind brand in our category, and why?*
— *Would you classify us as a brand? If so, why?*

There are many other questions you could add, but rather than dispatch online surveys, it's more valuable to have honest, confidential conversations directly with people. In those instances it's easier to expand the discussion based on their responses, which often provides additional insights. You can also gauge things by tracking any media your business, products or services has generated. This will begin to highlight perceptions and the market position of your company. The stronger those perceptions are—and the greater the influence your business commands in the market—the more likely it is that your business is either a brand, or is becoming one in the minds of others. It's also worth checking whether customers recognise your logo or identity. As mentioned previously, recognition for your branding is vital, but don't get

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A business becomes a brand when enough customers willingly align it with their personal identity. In return, the brand continually adds tangible value to customers' lives through specific products, services, status, experiences and convenience, among other things.

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sidetracked by this alone. Remember: *the logo is the symbol of a brand; it's not the brand in isolation, because context matters. And in more commercial terms, the logo doesn't make the brand—the brand gives the logo its value.*

The most important point to remember is not to mistake your logo for the entirety of your business or brand. Instead, see branding and broader communications as a crucial visual and verbal representation of your business as it evolves. It's also important to acknowledge how long your business has been in operation and to consider the time it usually takes to generate a loyal customer following, a tribe of people willing to identify with your business and continuously appreciate the value propositions or status that you provide to them. Don't forget, *Apple* has spent decades building and reinforcing their brand as it has continuously evolved. At different stages this has been carried out in a consistent manner by associating it with a specific set of Values, beliefs and propositions that it has been able to constantly deliver on (for the most part) and which has resonated with legions of customers across various ages and demographics. So much so that, for a large swathe of customers, *Apple* has become part of their identity—a brand they're willing to associate with and a community they are happy to belong to. The same can be said—to varying degrees—of other familiar brands.

The value of branding
Still, some businesses view branding purely as a finite marketing exercise. They see it as being important—to a point—and often refer to their logo as their 'brand'. In doing so, they separate branding from being integral to the business—how the business runs, what the business stands for, and the reputation tied up in its actions, behaviours and value propositions, as well as the perceptions it fosters. They acknowledge the need for a recognisable 'badge' for the business, but that's about it. Yet, branding is a communication tool, making it vital in establishing your business with confidence and as a means for providing a platform to build your brand over time. It shouldn't be dismissed as a line item for the Marketing

Department, or a novel creative exercise that has some importance but is rarely thought of again—until the need to *'freshen up the logo'* at some future point. So, let's look at an example of how valuable branding can be.

In 1994, *Supreme* began as a small skateboarding store in Lower Manhattan, New York, but has since grown into one of the most sought-after fashion brands in the world. It's a remarkable and compelling 'rags to riches' story. Whether by luck, intuition or profound business savvy, *Supreme's* founder, British-American entrepreneur James Jebbia, successfully shepherded the business from a rebel upstart into a $1B brand, after private equity firm *The Carlyle Group* acquired a 50% stake for $500 million in 2017. Interestingly, *Supreme's* branding has played a particular role in helping position the business in the market—and in the minds of their loyal customers. In 2019, writing for *CNN* Style, Jacopo Prisco reported:

"Jebbia has rewritten the rules for streetwear brands in the process, building Supreme's fame through social media hype and scarcity. Its clothes can only be bought online or through a network of just 11 stores worldwide: one each in LA, Paris and London, two in New York and six in Japan. It was in Japan that Supreme perfected a sales tactic known as the 'drop'—releasing a limited quantity of new clothes on a weekly basis, rather than an entire new collection every season. The strategy, now widely replicated by traditional fashion brands, prompted long lines at Supreme's stores and fueled online resale marketplaces where prices skyrocketed.

'Over time, it really became a huge frenzy,' said David Fischer, founder of streetwear and lifestyle website Highsnobiety. 'It became a huge event, where Supreme fans from around the world would line up in front of Supreme stores to get a hold of the latest product... It's not only about standing in line to buy a new product. It's just as much about being there with a community that you're a part of. Supreme's most valuable asset is arguably its simple logo, a red rectangle marked with the word "Supreme," which fashion platform Lyst crowned the industry's most powerful logo in 2018. It can turn almost anything into a collector's item.' [8]

With *Supreme*, Prisco illustrates how the business used an unconventional business model—based on a clear understanding of their customers—as a means to convert them into a community of avid fans who've adopted the brand as part of their personal identity. And all of this to the tune of $1B, which was built up over time and which leveraged the simplicity of its branding as a symbol of value. Yet, this value wasn't inherent in the logo at its inception. While the design co-opts artist Barbara Kruger's distinctive style—a celebrated American conceptual artist, whose work addresses topics of culture, power, identity, consumerism, and sexuality—it likely didn't initially have such deep meaning to a community of customers who eventually went on to embrace the logo and the brand as a means of personal expression. All of this was developed over time *by the business*—not by the branding designer. Of course, the branding designer made an enormously valuable *contribution* by providing clarity, distinction and a canvas for the business to build on. But it's the business and the community who actually built the brand over time.

All of this is further proof that a business becomes a brand when enough customers willingly align it with their personal identity. In return, the brand continually adds tangible value to customers' lives through specific products, services, status, experiences and convenience, among other things. All this is supported by the brand's actions and behaviours, which ultimately align with a customer's own aspirations and their view of the world. That's why brands constantly need to evolve and adapt as the world around us changes. However, while the brand adapts and changes, the *branding* can often remain the same.

8. *Battle of Supremes: How 'legal fakes' are challenging a $1B brand,* Jacopo Prisco, CNN Style, online article, 19 March 2019.