

FIGHT THE AVERAGE

MAKE YOUR BRAND
IMPOSSIBLE TO
IGNORE

Dries Henau & Yuri Vandenbogaerde

Lannoo
Campus

for the most recent trends and insights relevant to people with low incomes in their fifties in Belgium. What are their main concerns, such as social issues, technology adoption and lifestyle trends? Focus especially on health, finances, leisure and family. Include concrete examples and sources'. The more detailed your prompt, the more useful the answer will be. It helps enormously to first give the model context about your business and product before asking your question — think of it as briefing a colleague before sending them out on research duty.

But you don't always need the internet or AI. You can gather just as many insights by simply paying closer attention to the world around you. What topics seem to dominate the news cycle? Which brands suddenly pop up everywhere — and which ones quietly disappear? What's happening on Netflix and why are certain shows becoming cultural moments? Is that lead actor trending because of their climate activism — and is that something your audience might care about too? And why is LGBTQIA+ content finally being embraced by the mainstream — are you, as a brand, inclusive enough to be part of that conversation without sounding opportunistic?

For us, travelling has always been one of the best ways to absorb what's happening in the world. It doesn't even have to be intentional — your brain starts picking up patterns all on its own. Travel pulls you out of your bubble. Let's be honest: We often spend too much time behind our desks, making assumptions about people we've never met, all while operating in a world we may not even truly belong to anymore. Maybe we've climbed too many rungs on the income ladder to remember what certain struggles feel like. Maybe we've grown so distant from nature that four walls and fluorescent lights feel normal. Stepping into a different world — even briefly — is refreshing, humbling and incredibly valuable.

And no, you don't need to hop on a plane to do it. Travel can be found in smaller escapes too: disappearing into a novel that transports you somewhere unfamiliar, visiting a local community you rarely interact with, or finally trying that Indian restaurant around the corner instead of just walking past it again. New perspectives are often just one open mind — and sometimes only a naan bread — away. But here's the hard part: translating insights into action. Relevance isn't about collecting buzzwords so you can sound smart. It's about selecting the trends that fit your brand's values and matter to your audience. Ask yourself: Which evolutions strengthen our story? Which shifts offer us opportunity? Which trends should we ignore because they're not us? That's how you stay relevant without selling your soul. That's how you build a brand that doesn't just follow the world — it moves with it...

**WHEN
YOU FOLLOW
THE HERD**

you'll never become a brand.

**YOU'LL
GET
BRANDED.**

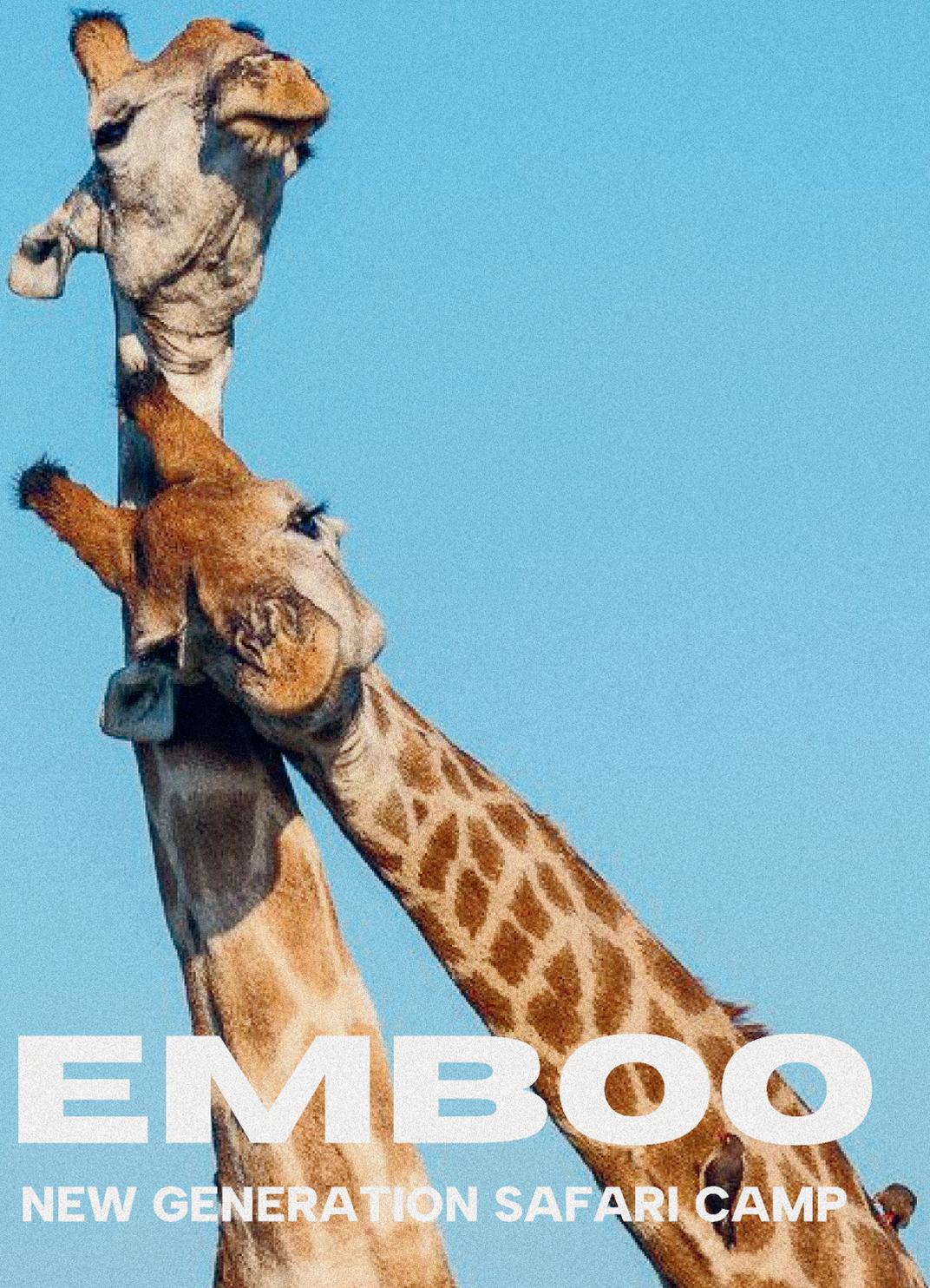


© Getty Images

'I am inspired by everything around me. It's not like I stand out in the moors or any of that romantic crap they throw around. I'm just inspired by being alive and breathing and meeting people and talking to people and doing things and absorbing what's happening. I think if more people did that there would be better fashion.'

Iris Apfel - Designer and fashion icon

IT'S IN OUR NATURE



EMBOO

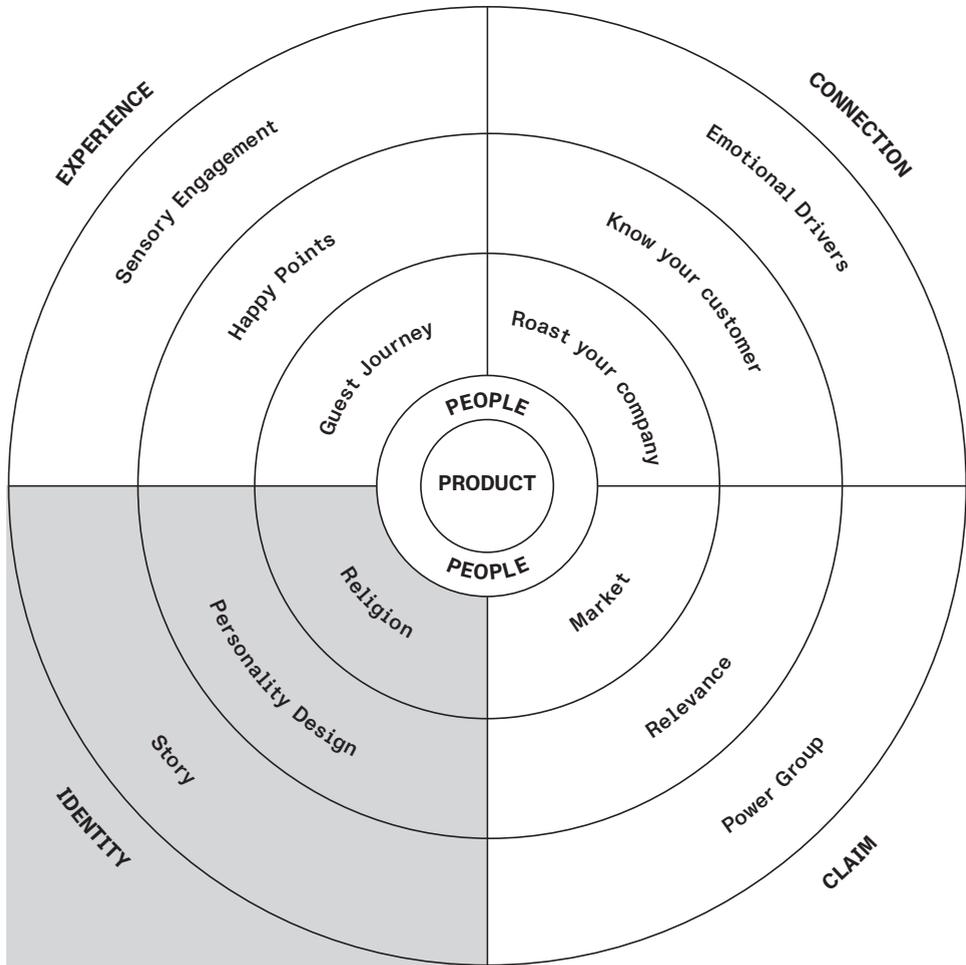
NEW GENERATION SAFARI CAMP

The shift in the brand story

These insights led Emboo to broaden its internal focus. Sustainability remained a core value, but it became part of a bigger story centred around unique safari experiences and adventurous yet carefree travel. Many safari camps try to be everything for everyone — from families to retirees and honeymooners on a budget. But together with Emboo, we chose a different path. From now on, they focus on one specific Power Group: the New Generation of Nature Discoverers — and that makes them truly unique in their industry.



Chapter 10: Identity: Who Are You as a Brand?



Good news! The hardest parts are behind us. No more digging and analysing — it's building time! Up to this point we've already used the word *connection* 42 times. Well 43 now. Feel free to count them if you're that way inclined, but honestly, that sounds like a waste of time and energy. We now know *who* we want to connect with, and we have a fair idea of our promise towards them. And as every book goes, each new chapter becomes more important than the last. Like a good wine, things only get better with time, right?

The building blocks of Identity

Right, back to the essentials. Your brand identity is the soul of your brand — who you are if your brand were a person, remember? A strong identity builds recognition, trust and — ta-da! — Connection.

In the **Identity quadrant**, we dive deeper into what makes your brand unique and how that comes to life. We do this with three building blocks:

Religion — The beliefs and values that drive your brand. This is why your brand exists and what makes it bigger than the products or services you sell.

Personality & Design — Who are you? What tone, style and attitude do you use to communicate? This is how you give your brand a recognisable voice. And eventually... yes, this is the make-up. The way your brand will look.

Story & Messaging — The unique story of your brand. It connects your mission to the dreams and emotions of your audience.

Together, these elements form the essence of who you are. A strong identity isn't just what you *say*, but how you show it, feel it and make others experience it. It's not that different from your *own* personal identity: whether you like to admit it or not, you think about things like: What do I believe in? What do I stand against? Who are my friends? What do I look like? How do I speak? And that's already hard enough — and in that case *you* are the only one making decisions about your own personality. But a brand? A brand is handled daily by different people — maybe even dozens or hundreds. Which is exactly why we need to be crystal clear about who we want to be as a brand — so that everyone working on it knows it — and even better: *feels* it.

Religion: Why do you do what you do?

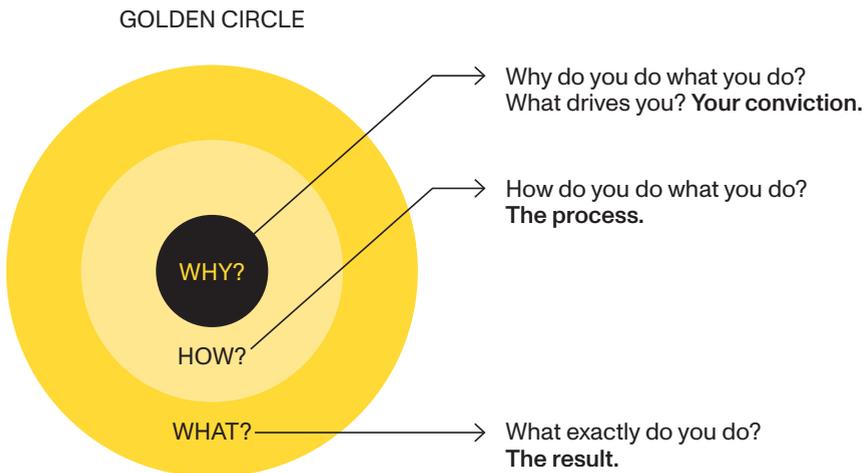
Six years ago, we got a rather unusual assignment from Ontex, one of the biggest manufacturers of hygiene products in the world. They asked us to organise a two-day workshop for their top management team — sixty executives from every corner of the planet. The goal? To think together about their purpose. The setting: a luxury hotel in Tenerife. On paper: glorious. In reality: we had a small problem. What in God's name *was* a purpose, exactly? Back then, 'purpose' was one of those trendy business words that floated around in glossy marketing decks. It

sounded meaningful, important even — but ask ten people to define it and you'd get eleven different answers. What did purpose have to do with business? With your brand? And what on earth had it to do with... nappies?

But we had sixty global executives flying in, so obviously we couldn't just rock up and wing it like a uni presentation. We did what every professional does in a moment of panic: We binge-researched like maniacs. Two weeks straight we devoured books, articles, videos — anything we could get our hands on about Purpose, Mission and Vision. Spoiler alert: There wasn't much. And what *did* exist mostly contradicted itself.

And there we were: preparing to explain this mess to sixty high-level employees of a publicly listed multinational. About nappies. No pressure at all. *Gulp*.

But of course, every panic story needs a silver lining — and ours came wrapped in a TED Talk from Simon Sinek. (Sorry for the dramatic buildup. Had to keep up the suspense.



The Golden Circle

Simon Sinek's **Golden Circle** is a simple but brilliant model that explains why some companies inspire fiercely loyal fans while others flap around on the surface forever, desperately trying to be noticed. According to Sinek, most businesses communicate from the outside in. They start with **What** they do, then explain **How** they do it — and that's usually where the story dies a slow,

Purpose (Why)

'We believe in a world where the biggest goal in life is to be genuinely happy'.

Boardwalk's Purpose goes beyond hospitality. It's a higher belief that drives their brand: contributing to a world where people can be truly happy. Not defined by a flashy car or a designer handbag — but by genuine joy. Imagine a world where happiness was the true measure of success. That belief sits at the heart of every decision they make.

Vision (How)

'To offer a well-curated vacation as a true booster for people's happiness'.

Boardwalk's Vision translates their Purpose into a tangible ambition. They don't just want to be a place to stay — they want to be a destination where people recharge, celebrate life and create memories that last long after they've gone home. This is more than 'getting away from it all' or 'soaking up a bit of sun'. It's about offering experiences that enrich people's lives in between the chaos of everyday work.

Mission (What)

'At Boardwalk Aruba, our mission is to provide a haven of barefoot luxury. We curate unique and intimate vacation experiences that celebrate the simplicity of life while pursuing the highest level of hospitality. We are committed to creating moments of pure enjoyment, making every stay a celebration of island living and the pursuit of genuine happiness for our guests, our team, our community and our planet'.

With their Mission, Boardwalk makes their ambition actionable. Every day, their team creates intimate, meaningful holiday experiences that combine small moments of joy with barefoot luxury — always with respect for their guests, their team and the natural world that surrounds them.

By defining these foundations clearly, Boardwalk has grown into a brand that breathes happiness — not just in the service they deliver, but in the stories guests take home with them.

What makes Boardwalk unique?

A clearly defined Power Group & Claim: By boldly choosing a niche, they quickly became the most logical and best choice for couples without children.

Purpose as their driving force: Guests can feel that Boardwalk offers more than hotel rooms. It's about returning home renewed. Focussing on happiness, tranquility and connection.

Vision as their horizon: Boardwalk aims to make holidays that genuinely improve people’s lives, not just fill their calendars.

Mission as their roadmap: Every day, Boardwalk turns ambition into action — from barefoot luxury to thoughtful details and personalised stays. The team really *thinks with* the guest: Which restaurants would make this couple light up? What secret part of the island will mean the most to this guest?

Boardwalk proves that a well-defined Power Group, Claim and Religion not only guides a brand — but also inspires.. They transform a business from a product into an experience people *feel*. And when you consciously choose your niche, you build loyalty that can’t be bought. The impact was so strong that this foundation now lives in every part of their company. If someone on the team wants to propose a new SOP (Standard Operating Procedure), they first have to ask: How does this contribute to our Purpose and Vision? Does this improve our Power Group’s experience? Does it increase happiness? And be honest — if you were on the house-keeping team, what would motivate you more: ticking off rooms on a cleaning list, or knowing you’re actually creating happiness for the guests?

Exactly.

Values: The principles that define your brand

In a world where consumers are more conscious than ever, values are more essential than ever. They shape how your brand is perceived, how you respond in challenging situations and, perhaps most importantly, whether people trust you. You won’t win anyone over with generic corporate wallpaper like ‘Inclusivity, Teamwork & Respect’ printed in large vinyl letters behind the CEO’s desk. Real values don’t need to be shouted from the rooftops, but should be tangible in everything you do.

How values strengthen your brand:

Values build trust: When you stay true to your principles — especially when it’s inconvenient — you earn credibility. People believe what they repeatedly experience.

Values create loyalty: Customers choose brands that reflect their beliefs. When people recognise themselves in your values, they feel connected. That connection makes your brand both recognisable and distinctive.

Values prevent reputational risk: Brands that take their values seriously stay authentic and avoid traps like greenwashing, token activism or shallow virtue-signalling. Strong values are more than words; they act as a compass that keeps your brand honest.

Example: Patagonia

In September 2022, Yvon Chouinard, founder of Patagonia, wrote a letter that we love to share. It's a perfect example of how a clear Religion gives direction — and how it can turn a company into a genuine force for good. For business, and for society.

Earth is now our only shareholder.

If we have any hope of a thriving planet — let alone a thriving business — it will take all of us doing what we can with the resources we have. This is what we can do.

I never wanted to be a businessman. I started as a craftsman, making climbing gear for my friends and myself, and only later moved into clothing. As we became more aware of global warming and the ecological destruction happening around us — including our own contribution to it — Patagonia decided to use our business to change the way things are done. If we could do the right thing and still make enough to stay in business, we could influence customers and other companies — maybe even change the system.

We began with our products, using materials that did less harm to nature. Every year we donated 1% of our revenue. We became a certified B Corp and a California Benefit Corporation, and we wrote our values into our company charter to protect them. More recently, in 2018, we changed the company's Purpose to: We're in business to save our home planet.

Despite our best efforts, it still wasn't enough. We needed to find a way to invest more money into fighting the environmental crisis — while staying true to our company values.

One option was to sell Patagonia and donate all the money. But we couldn't be sure a new owner would maintain our values — or keep our global team employed.

Another option was to take the company public. That would have been a disaster. Even well-intentioned public companies are under relentless pressure to deliver short-term profit at the expense of long-term responsibility and sustainability.

Honestly, there were no good options. So we created our own.

Instead of 'going public', you could say we went 'purpose'. Instead of extracting value from nature and turning it into wealth for investors, we're using the wealth Patagonia creates to protect the source of all wealth: the planet.

Here's how it works. 100% of the voting stock has been transferred to the Patagonia Purpose Trust, which exists solely to protect our company values. 100% of the non-voting stock has been donated to the Holdfast Collective, a non-profit organisation dedicated to protecting nature and fighting the environmental crisis. Patagonia itself funds this structure: each year, after reinvesting in the business, any profit is paid as a dividend to support the fight against the crisis.

It's almost 50 years since we began this experiment in responsible business — and we're only just getting started. If we want a thriving planet — let alone thriving businesses — over the next 50 years, we all need to do what we can with the resources we have. This is our contribution.

Despite its immense beauty, Earth's resources are not infinite — and it's clear we've gone beyond its limits. But our planet is resilient. We can save it, if we commit to it.

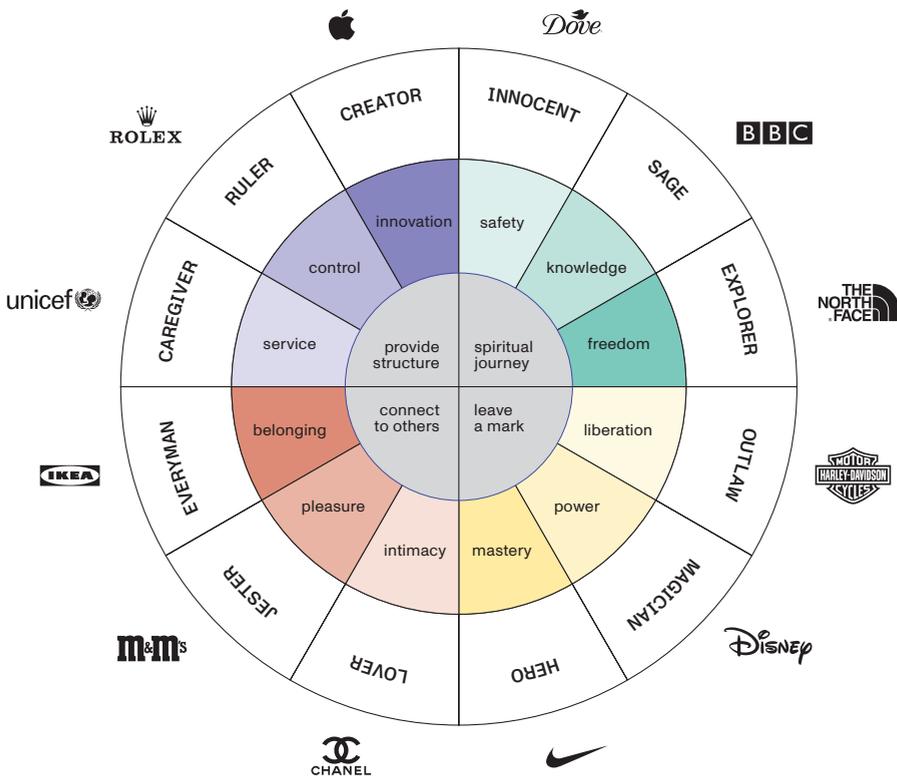
We're not asking you to donate your company — don't panic — but hopefully this gets you thinking about what your real Religion is.

Brand Persona: What kind of 'person' is your brand?

People don't buy from companies, they buy from people. It's a cliché because it's true. A strong brand is more than a logo or a product — it has a personality. A character that feels recognisable, relatable and human. That personality is your **Brand Persona**.

Imagine your brand as a person. How would it speak? How would it behave? What impression would it leave behind? In other words: Who would your Power Group turn to when they have a problem? A wise mentor? A fearless adventurer? A rebellious outsider? Or maybe a sophisticated expert?

The heart of your brand personality is your Brand Persona — a fictional yet clearly defined character that gives your brand a face, a voice and an attitude.



The Jungian Archetypes

To build a strong Brand Persona, you can draw inspiration from the archetypes of Carl Jung — universal character types found in myths, films and stories across cultures. Some of the twelve well-known archetypes include:

Rebel: Defiant and unconventional. Think Harley-Davidson, symbol of freedom and independence.

Hero: Focused on achievement and winning. The ultimate example? Nike.

Magician: Creates transformation and wonder. Just look at Disney.

Jester: Fun, playful, light-hearted. Ben & Jerry's lives and breathes this energy.

Sage: Seeks truth, wisdom and insight; values knowledge above all. Famous brands like: Google or BBC go here.

Explorer: Craves freedom, discovery and self-determination; wants to escape the ordinary. Think: The North Face.

Innocent: Optimistic, pure, honest; promises simplicity and goodness. Exactly what Dove promises.

Everyman: (Regular Guy/Girl) Approachable, genuine, relatable; wants to belong. Ta-dah! IKEA.

Lover: All about passion, intimacy, connection and aesthetics. Think of Chanel Parfums.

Caregiver: Nurturing, compassionate, protective; wants to care for others. Why moms trust Johnson & Johnson.

Ruler: Takes control, brings order, sets the standard; confident and authoritative. What Rolex promises.

Creator: Driven by imagination, vision and self-expression; wants to build something meaningful. Apple, Lego,...

Archetypes work because they are instantly recognisable. People get them. They provide a clear direction for how a brand should behave and communicate.

How to apply this

Jung's archetypes are a great starting point — solid and backed by philosophy. But in practice, they can feel too abstract or limiting. Most brands don't fit neatly into one archetype. That's why we often combine **two** — **sometimes three** — each with a percentage, to create nuance without losing clarity. Still, brands need something more personal. That's why we believe every brand deserves its own Brand Persona: unique, detailed and full of character.

Your problem isn't
competition, it's blending in

Story & Messaging: Hello, bonjour!

Here it is — the moment everyone has been waiting for. The big reveal. The monkey from the sleeve. Storytelling. People like to call it *the holy grail*. Rubbish. It's not holy, it's just hard. Like, very, very hard. But when you do it right, it turns your brand from *'Oh yeah, that company'* into *'I love these people — shut up and take my money'*.

Your Religion gave your brand beliefs. Your Personality made those beliefs human. Now it's time to bring it out into the world. We now know what we want to say (Religion & Claim), who we're speaking to (Power Group), who we are as a person (Identity). Next, we build the story — the external layer.

Messaging has four main elements — together, these form the backbone of your communication: **Pitch, Tagline, Baseline** and **Slogan**.

1. Pitch: Your brand in one powerful message

A strong identity deserves a strong introduction.

Look, you can't start reciting your full Manifesto at a networking event — well, you *could*, but people would slowly back away from you and avoid eye contact forever.

In addition to your Manifesto, your Pitch recaps the essence of your brand in a few sentences, albeit in a less emotional and more to-the-point manner.. It's a short, sharp explanation that instantly tells people who you are, what you do and why anyone should care.

Then what do you say when someone asks: *'So, what do you do?'* Be honest — how often do you trip over your own words at that moment? Exactly. That's why you need a Pitch. It forces you to get to the heart of your brand. It is the ultimate test of whether you really know what you stand for.

Why a Pitch is essential

In a world where attention is shorter than a TikTok (Anyone else feeling mildly overstimulated?), your Pitch is your entry ticket. You've got seconds — not min-

Guest Journey: Step into your customer's shoes

A positive total experience is an art — not in the fluffy, abstract sense, but in the very practical sense of designing a journey that guides your customer from first discovery to repeat purchase to full-blown brand ambassador. It's the sum of all the interactions between your brand and your customer.

Mapping a Guest Journey is actually quite straightforward. You step into your customer's shoes and consider their experience from months before the first purchase to months after.

- 1. List every touchpoint.** Identify every moment a potential or existing customer can interact with your brand — from ads, Instagram posts and landing pages to checkout, delivery and follow-up service.
- 2. Think like your customer.** For each touchpoint, ask: What is the customer *thinking, feeling and experiencing*? Where do they get frustrated? Where do you make them smile? Is something missing?
- 3. Fix the friction.** Fill the gaps, streamline clunky moments, and make sure everything flows logically. What makes perfect sense to you internally might feel like a bureaucratic nightmare to your customer.

If you've ever tried to complete a tax return via HMRC's Self Assessment portal in the UK, you've already survived a perfect example of a *horrendous* Guest Journey. Helpful tip: If your customer needs a YouTube tutorial to navigate your platform, something has gone horribly wrong.

Mapping your Guest Journey brings clarity and focus. It reveals where you are already delighting your customer — and where you're unintentionally torturing them.

Our good friend Polle De Maagt, Dutch brand strategist, like us, is obsessed with one particular example of bad experience design. You've probably had this happen: You're in a hotel room, you read a few pages in bed, you're drifting off... but now the lights have to go out. Except the switch for that one little lamp is nowhere near the bed. Suddenly you're playing *Escape Room: Bedtime Edition*, stumbling around in the dark like an idiot trying to find that one switch that controls that one mysterious lamp. Small detail, massive irritation. So ask yourself: What is *your* lamp? Where in your Guest Journey are you causing small but unforgettable frustrations — the kind that keep people from coming back?

WHEN WAS
THE LAST
TIME
YOU WERE
TRULY
BLOWN
AWAY?