

Building your brand

Why branding is important

As a freelance, it could be said that you are your brand – the quality of your work, your personality and the way you get on with your clients will leave an impression. Assuming this is a good one, this will help you establish long and fruitful working relationships.

However, in a highly competitive world, finding ways to establish, develop and convey a brand (that helps differentiate you from the crowd) is an effective marketing tool. Most freelancers may not have the deep pockets that large corporates have to build global brands but the same basic principles apply (see below).

Also, whether you create your own brand or not, people will automatically form opinions of you – or worse, not remember you at all. This means it's worth putting in the thought and effort to help influence the opinions of others in the way that you want to be perceived and to ensure that you leave a lasting impression – for the right reasons – in your clients' and potential clients' minds.

Developing your brand

Define your values

Ask yourself how you want to be perceived now and in the longer-term. What is your competitive edge? What are the defining qualities of your work and your attitude that make you stand out from the crowd?

For example, as a writer, your brand values might focus on being fast, efficient and innovative; as an actor on being stylish, adaptable and easy to work with and as a musician on being original, flexible and expert in a particular area. It's up to you to weigh it up.

Your values should be authentic because you'll need to deliver them time and again if you're going to create a successful brand. For example, if you say you are efficient and innovative but, in practice, miss deadlines and haven't come up with a new idea in a decade, you're on the wrong branding track.

Look at successful brands

Have a look at some of your favourite brands (individuals or companies) to see what makes them successful. For example, celebrity chef Jamie Oliver hit the right mark with the public who identified with his 'down-to-earth, friendly, Essex-boy' style; super star Michael Jackson's glove remains iconic; actor Johnny Depp is 'cool' personified; journalist Jeremy Paxman 'takes no prisoners' in his interviews – the list is endless.



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What's noticeable about the examples above is that each person is extremely talented (in their chosen field) but their particular brand (whether based on values, characteristics or objects) differentiates them from others who may be equally talented but have no such distinctive qualities.

So, think about what your brand could offer that your industry will identify with and remember.

Think outside the box

For example, if you're a magician, could your business card perhaps be in the shape and style of a playing card? It's all about standing out from the crowd. However, if you get too 'gimmicky', the result might be tacky rather than whacky – the art is getting the right balance for you and the people you want to impress.

Briefing your designer

You may well want to invest in a professional to help you develop your brand. This doesn't have to cost a lot and is likely to ensure that you save money in the longer-term and create a brand that is successful for you.

If you do commission a designer, it's important to give them as much information as possible – how you wish to be perceived; what type of industry you work in and who your competitors are. The more information they have, the better chance they have of creating a logo identity that is positioned correctly for you.

Road test

Before settling on your brand elements such as logo and colours, ask for feedback. It's always good to get an objective opinion.

Initiate, review and revise

A brand isn't built overnight. It takes time so keep at it and keep thinking of new ways to promote and engage your brand to new and existing clients.

Through your clients' eyes

Remember, your brand is only successful if your clients perceive it as so. A major indicator of this is if they employ you! Always try to get feedback/testimonials from clients to see how they view your service. These also carry a lot of weight to prospective clients. If you don't get a job that you've gone for, don't be afraid to ask for feedback – this helps us to learn and improved for next time.



Conveying your brand

Once you've defined your brand, you need to communicate it consistently to your target audience. Your 'branding tool kit' might consist of:

- You – face-to-face – of course! The way you perform in professional situations will have an impact on your brand image. This might include your communications skills and the visual way you present yourself through the way your dress.
- Your logo – the mark of identity of your brand, which might be 'wordform', 'pictorial', 'letterform' or 'symbolic'.
- Straplines/key messages: to convey key brand values – often included in all media
- Testimonials
- Signature
- Business card
- Covering letter and CV
- Portfolio
- Website
- Email address
- Newsletter/leaflet
- Twitter
- Facebook
- Blog/video blog/podcast/images
- LinkedIn

*Be realistic when you choose the media that helps convey your brand. Time management is a huge challenge for freelancers, so take a step-by-step approach. For example, get a business card that you can keep with you at all times and, for example, if your target audience favours Twitter, start Tweeting.

Design tips

Keep it simple

Your logo identity will need to be used on business cards, flyers and websites – it needs to still be clearly defined when small in size.

Be relevant

If you are going to use a symbol with your logo, try and align it with something that has a meaning to what you represent. For example, the Nike logo was named after the Greek goddess of victory and the ‘swoosh’ is an abstraction of a wing.

Create the right impression

Colours, fonts, headlines, sub-heads and strap lines help draw in the audience’s eye and form the overall feeling of what you’re aiming to portray. Less is usually more in this instance. Rather than eye-catching, too many colours and fonts, for example, create a ‘dog’s dinner’.

Be consistent

In part, successful brand building relies on repetition of key visuals and messages. So, make sure your brand design elements (e.g., logo, strapline, colours and fonts) appear on every communication.

Be contemporary not trendy

Trends come and go so don’t just pick a colour, shape, or font because it is fashionable today – tomorrow it may look dated.

Branding is an investment

However much or little you have to spend on creating a brand identity, doing something is better than nothing. The creative industries are highly competitive and therefore we need to make sure we stand out for the right reasons – successful branding can help us achieve this.

